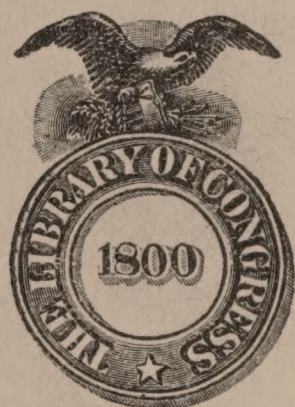


THE
BLACK
BROTHERHOOD

REV. R. P. GARROLD, S. J.



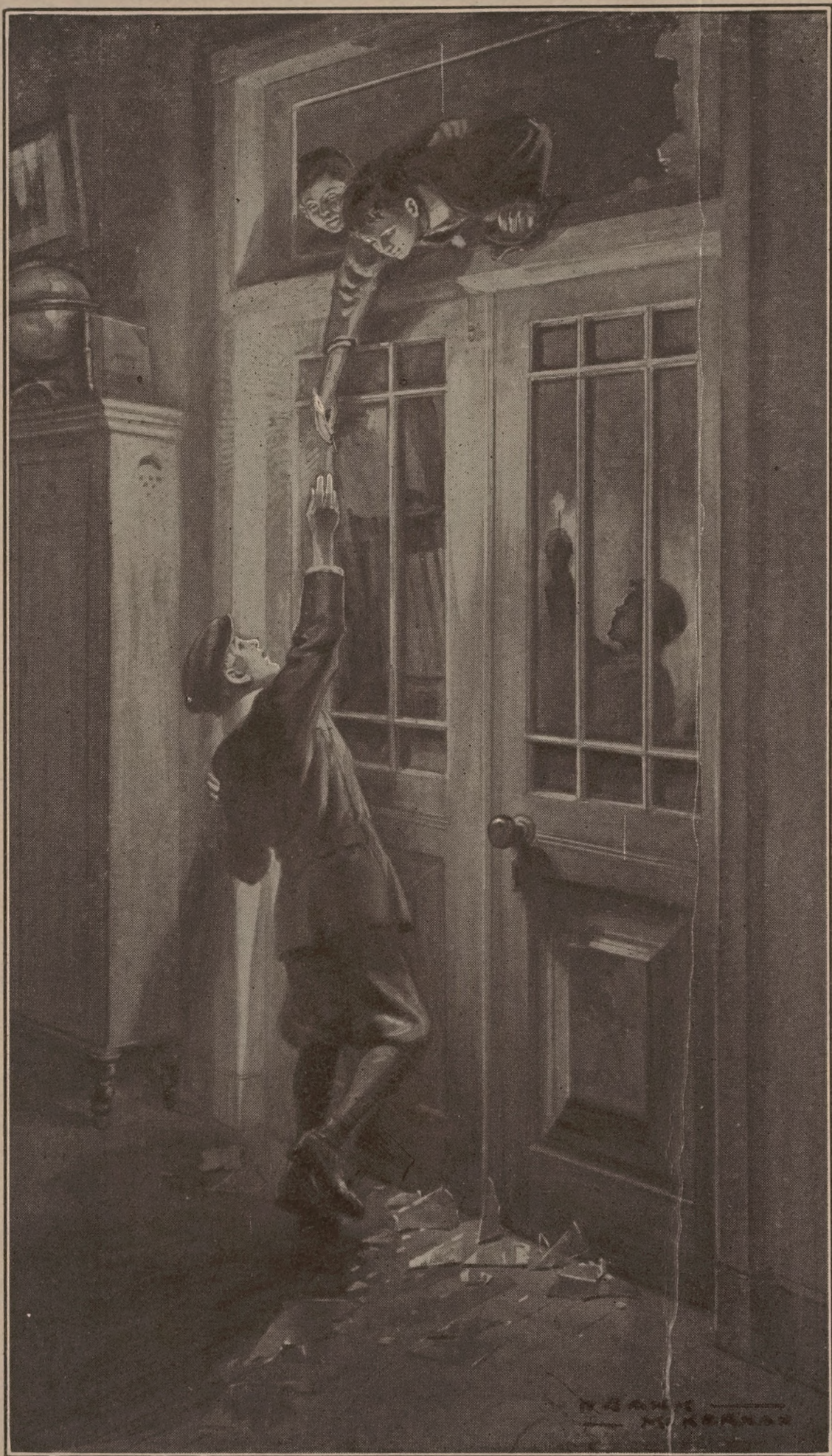
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**THE BLACK BROTHERHOOD AND
SOME OF ITS SISTERS**



“He wriggled half way through, and handed one of the
lighted ends down to William” —Page 176

The Black Brotherhood AND Some of Its Sisters

A Story of Home and School

BY
REV. R. P. GARROLD, S.J.

*Author of "Freddy Carr and His Friends,"
"The Boys of St. Batt's," etc.*



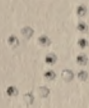
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TO

Some Friends of Mine

WHO HELPED ME TO
WRITE THIS STORY

There is a Kingdom magical, a Kingdom fair and
true,
With gardens bright, and rivers white, and a heaven
harebell blue,
And simple mind of a people kind as ever a young
man knew.

I sing it; I say it; I think of it all day long,
For the story of my people is ever at tip of tongue,
It hideth not in the heart of me, but breaketh full
forth in song.

Certain little lanes in shadow; certain little byways
still;
Certain treasure deep and pleasure of a sunrise from
a hill;
Shadowed, hidden, highways haunted, and the burst
of starlings' trill.

In that Kingdom I will hide me. I will take me
to a land
Where are sunshot trees and hedges, and the flowers
grow out of hand.
To a certain people kindly, whose houses as rocks
do stand.
And to my Kingdom splendid, my Kingdom kind and
true,
All glad and gay, I'll go one day, and wander the
whole land through,
'Mid a people kind, of as happy a mind, as ever a
young man knew.

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The Black Brotherhood and Some of Its Sisters

CHAPTER I

OF CANDLE ENDS AND KINDRED SUBJECTS

IT IS not recorded how the Black Brotherhood came into existence, nor why it was so called, nor what its exact objects were. Like the British Constitution, it grew little by little, and depended more upon tradition and precedent than upon any formal written document. There was always something mysterious and inexplicable about it, and that is one of the reasons why I do not attempt to describe its origin, but introduce it when fully developed at a date and a moment when its members had just entered upon their first term in the Third Form. To be quite precise, it was on a Monday evening at twenty minutes to five.

To look at, they did not appear particularly black, in fact scarcely black at all. One was distinctly chubby and pink, one was chubby and brown, and one was pale and had yellowish, curly hair. Yet in spite of this absence of

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anything that could justify their grim appellation, they *were* the Black Brotherhood, the whole of it; there were no more black brothers. The name of the one with yellowish curly hair was Comoran, and his Christian name was Alexander. The names of the other two will come out later on, but just at this point Alexander is the most important, so I should like to have him quite clear. Yellowish curly hair, a pale face and a quite extraordinary power of looking virtuous.

Now the whole of this rather bulky book is taken up with narrating the adventures of these three black brothers, and if I were asked to explain why I am writing it I might find it rather difficult to do so. It is certainly not because I think them particularly wise, or, indeed, in any way very remarkable, nor yet because I think their example is likely, in every particular at least, to edify and elevate; nor again is it because their career teaches the valuable lesson (as undoubtedly it does) that people who do silly things are apt to regret it. I fancy the real reason must be that I like the Black Brothers, though they often made exorbitant demands upon my patience, and that I enjoy watching over their fortunes as a sort of amiable presiding genius. But, after all,

why should I be at pains to explain to a cold world my reasons for writing? It is for you, dear sir or madam, to judge whether you find it worth the reading, and for you again to discover the moral which I assure you is written in it large as life, if you will only take the trouble to look about a little for it. And so to our black heroes again.

On this particular Monday afternoon, at twenty minutes to five, all three were in their class room, which, to begin with, was a foolish thing, because they ought to have started for home at four fifteen. Alexander was sitting on a desk swinging his legs and scowling savagely. The other two were slowly, and with long intervals for rest and conversation, putting their books away.

"It's puffedtly disgusting," said Alexander, in a tone of great exasperation. "We'll just *have* to do something soon," and he thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"You've said that before," said one of the chubby Black Brothers—William May was his name. Besides being chubby he wore a Norfolk suit and the knees of his stockings had been darned, and his collar had a spot of ink on it. All of which are Indications of Character.

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"I dessay I have," answered Alexander snappishly; "I dessay I shall say it again; I shall if I like."

"All right, you *can*," said William; "it won't stop it being pretty silly," and he returned contemptuously to the task of packing up his books.

"If you think I'm goin' to be called names by a kid like you," said Alexander, getting down from his seat, "you're jolly well mistaken, young Billy." He came over in the direction of William's desk with the intention of pushing his French dictionary on to the floor, which would have been an act of war. However, at this moment the third Black Brother interposed. Though he was the youngest and smallest of the three, he enjoyed the privilege of wearing long trousers, and was the only boy in the class who could boast of that distinction. There were grave reasons for it, as we shall see later on. He wore a necktie, tied in a bow, of a beautiful heliotrope color, flecked with pink spots; also his boots needed blacking very badly. These again are Indications of Character. His name was Tommy Browne.

"Oh, chuck it, Aleck," he said wearily, understanding the meaning of Alexander's move. "If you kick up a row some one'll come. Why

don't you think of somethin' sensible to do, 'stead of jawin'?"

"I *have* thought of things," said Alexander, in an aggrieved tone, "but Billy an' you always funk doing them."

"'Cos they're generally cribbed out of books and won't work," said William.

"Or else too dangerous," said Tommy; "there's no fun in gettin' sent down every day."

"*Well, we've got to do somethin',*" said Alexander deliberately, and with a defiant look at William, "and pretty soon. Considering we've only just begun trigonometry, I call it puffectly scand'lus."

"We'll have about a hundred examples a night by the end of term if it goes on like this," said Tommy mournfully, "and it's no use askin' him not to, 'cos he only makes some silly joke if you do."

No one answered, and Alexander put his hands in his coat pocket and stared despondently at the blackboard. There were some mathematical formulæ written on it, which he carefully smudged with his little finger, and then returned his hand to his pocket again. The pocket was fairly full of miscellaneous articles, and it so happened that the one upper-

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most at that moment was a piece of candle end. A trivial circumstance, you may think, and yet one upon which the whole of this story depends. I do not exaggerate when I say that the long and complicated series of adventures which are about to unfold before the reader flow from that candle end. Our whole vast edifice is built upon it. In an evil hour had Alexander extracted it illicitly from a candlestick on the hall table, with a view to indulging in a little light reading at night after the orthodox means of illumination had been removed.

For no reason in particular, except perhaps that it *was* uppermost, he drew it from his pocket and thoughtfully pinched the end to see if it were soft. Then he rubbed his nail down it, making a crinkly strip come off. And then, still without any particular reason, he ran it along the sharp edge of the blackboard so as to make a notch in it.

The other two had been watching him, and at this point they interposed. "Look out, you silly idjut," said William; "you'll spoil the board if you don't mind."

"Will I?" said Alexander loftily. "Who cares!" And he deliberately drew the candle end, broadside on, across the board, making a thick, greasy line.

"You *ass*," cried Tommy in alarm, "you've spoiled the whole show. It won't write where you've greased it."

"Won't it?" said Alexander; "how funny!" and he drew another thick line across the board in the opposite direction. Then he stepped back a pace or two and surveyed his handiwork. "There!" he said, "I fancy that'll about fetch him; you can't say I got *that* out of a book."

The reason of the thing dawned at this point upon the other two. It was a measure of retaliation. They stood for a moment speechless with awe and admiration.

Alexander drew another line, and then held out the candle end to William. "Now you do some," he said. William hesitated. "Afraid!" said Alexander scornfully.

"I'm not," said William.

"Well, take it, then," said Alexander, and William took it. After a moment's thought he wrote on the board (in candle grease) the words Cos, Sin, Tan. They are trigonometrical technicalities, in case you have not got so far.

"Good!" said Alexander. "Now *you*, Tommy." Tommy took the candle end, and not to be outdone in originality, wrote under-

neath, "Is all rot." Then all three stepped back and surveyed the blackboard in silence.

You could only read the writing if you looked at it at certain angles; at first sight there did not seem to be anything the matter with the board. It was when you tried to write on it with chalk that the full extent of the damage became manifest. The chalk slithered about in a helpless sort of way and refused to make more than a few feeble scratches.

"Won't there be a row when he tries to write on it to-morrow!" said William, and gave a nervous sort of giggle. Nobody answered this remark, but Thomas said he thought they'd better cut off as soon as possible, which was certainly sensible. They were just about to follow his advice when the noise of footsteps was heard in the passage outside. The candle end disappeared with lightning-like rapidity, and all three were immediately engrossed in the task of putting up their books.

They breathed more freely when they saw who it was. It was Mr. Tanqueray. Now, Mr. Tanqueray was one of those beautiful souls (too rare, alas! in this imperfect world) who never suspect anything and never notice things. When he saw the Black Brothers packing up their books he simply said, "Now, what

are you boys doing here? You ought to have gone home long ago." Nothing more than that.

"Please, sir, we're just going," said Alexander, looking more virtuous than usual; he was always at his best when taken red handed. The logically minded will notice that it was not really an answer, but fortunately Mr. Tanqueray was no blind worshiper of logic, and only told them to be quick and asked them if they'd seen his spectacles. They said they had not, and at once began politely to look for them, trying all the time to keep between Mr. Tanqueray and the board, though the precaution was scarcely necessary.

They did not find the spectacles, because, as a matter of fact, they were at that moment lying beneath a pile of examination papers in Mr. Tanqueray's own room. When the search was at last abandoned the three boys shut up their desks and wished the master good night. He followed them out of the room and locked the door after him.

"I thought we were spotted that time for a dead cert," said William, when they got outside into the street. "Didn't you, chaps?"

"Not much," said Alexander; "I don't believe Old Tanks 'd notice if you let a gun off

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under his chair. I wish some of the others were a bit more like him."

"The Coon isn't," said William. "Oh, golly!" This last exclamation was due to the fact that at that moment they had, in turning a corner, almost run into the arms of Mr. Paul Colquhoun, the very object of their recent disapproval. But he fortunately did not hear, and nodded pleasantly to them as they raised their caps. After that they went home and spent part of the evening in working out trigonometrical examples and the rest in wondering what would happen next morning. If the truth must be told, all three rather wished they hadn't done it, and they would have wished that still more if they had had any inkling of all it was to lead to. But the future being fortunately hidden from them, they slept fairly peacefully, hoping for the best.

CHAPTER II

THE MINE EXPLODES

MR. PAUL COLQUHOUN was a model of punctuality, neatness, and all the mathematical virtues. He always arrived in the class room five minutes before the advertised hour for starting, and so had everything arranged in order by the time the class assembled. On the desk was the open register ready for marking; by the side of it a pile of exercise books exquisitely corrected in red ink; on the top of the exercise books, precisely in the center, a few small squares of white paper; by the side of the pile a pair of blackboard compasses and three pieces of chalk—white, blue, and red. Mr. Colquhoun himself stood three feet from the desk with his eyes fixed on the door to guard against the possibility of any boy bringing mud in on his boots. If he did, “he left much quicker than he came” (as the poet says)—“for *reasons*.”

When next morning the three Black Brothers entered the class room everything was just as usual. A cautious glance at the blackboard showed no miracle during the night had

repaired the damage, a glance at Mr. Colquhoun calmly examining boots assured them the outrage was still undiscovered, and that the bomb had still to explode. With anxious hearts and many secret misgivings they took their places and waited for the crash.

It was a disconcertingly long time in coming. Mr. Colquhoun began the lesson by commenting severely on the character of the work he had just been correcting. The class listened respectfully and without impatience, for though it was painful to hear that their master was not satisfied with their well-meant efforts to carry out his instructions, it was at least so much time taken off the hour, a short respite from the brain-fag inseparable from the study of trigonometry. But their feelings changed when he wound up his address by saying that they would find the examples which had to be done again indicated by a small red cross. Then he distributed the pile of exercise books, and a sigh of dismay went up as they saw with what an unsparing hand these tokens had been distributed. Comoran had no less than five, and began to feel glad, in spite of danger, that the sword of vengeance had been unsheathed.

When at last Mr. Colquhoun had finished his denunciatory address, he proceeded to offer

a few remarks upon the subject of logarithms, and in the first place endeavored to obtain from the class an accurate definition. It is matter for regret that they were unable to provide him with one; even Attwood, the mathematical star of the class (he was generally believed to be related to the man who made the machine, which you will have heard about if you have done mechanics), broke down in the middle and mixed things up. Mr. Colquhoun was justly indignant. "How often have I told you," he exclaimed, "that you must know *this* definition at least. How often have I repeated it to you, and told you to learn it, and emphasized its importance in every imaginable way? Potter, haven't I done so at least a hundred times?"

"Yes, sir," said the member addressed, a biggish boy with a rather stolid face. His tone of voice was respectfully sympathetic, as of one who mourns for a calamity he is powerless to avert.

"Yes, at the very least," said Mr. Colquhoun. "Probably more. Well, I will give it once again; listen, all of you," and he repeated with upraised finger and in an emphatic voice: "*The Logarithm of a number to a given base is the index of the power to which the base must*

be raised to produce that number." The class listened attentively, and one or two appeared to be taking notes.

"Now," continued Mr. Colquhoun, "that you may have no possible excuse next time, I will write the definition on the board in characters as large as the space at my disposal will permit." He stopped at the desk and took up a piece of chalk. Three hearts under three waistcoats began to beat with unusual rapidity.

He executed the preliminary flourish to what, under happier circumstances, would have been a very fine capital T, and applied the chalk to the board. It so happened that it alighted in the very middle of one of Alexander's diagonal lines. The inevitable result followed, and in trying a second time the chalk broke. There was a faint titter, which was immediately suppressed as Mr. Colquhoun turned and faced the class.

"What monkey trick is this?" he asked indignantly. "Which of you has been tampering with the board?" He cast a searching glance round the room, and nearly every one looked uncomfortable except Comoran, who merely looked more virtuous than usual. It was perhaps this singularity which attracted Mr. Colquhoun's attention. "Comoran," he

said, after a lengthy survey and a rapid calculation of probabilities, "will you come out here, please?" Comoran rose at once, apparently quite unperturbed. His fellow-conspirators turned cold all over and blew their noses to hide their embarrassment. "Stand just there, please," said Mr. Colquhoun, indicating a place at the side of the blackboard. "Now, tell me what you see."

"*See*, sir!" said Alexander with mild surprise, and gazing thoughtfully out of the window. "Nothing, sir."

"No impertinence, Comoran," said the master. "Not out of the window—on the board."

"It looks like *writing*, sir," said Alexander, after a careful examination, with a slightly incredulous intonation, as though to suggest that we can not always believe the evidence of our senses.

"Does it not, Comoran?" said the master. "Perhaps you will be good enough to read it for us."

"I think it looks like cos, sin, tan, sir," said Comoran, after another lengthy survey.

"Yes, and what else, Comoran," said Mr. Colquhoun impatiently. Comoran was silent, and modestly cast down his eyes.

"Read it," thundered the master.

"Is all rot, sir," said Comoran, trying to convey the impression that he did not share in the unfavorable judgment. The class tittered rather more loudly, but Mr. Colquhoun left them unrebuked. His eyes were fixed on Comoran, who looked the very picture of the good boy who has just said his lesson well. But Mr. Colquhoun knew his Alexander, or fancied he did, and felt surer than ever that he had hit upon the culprit.

"Comoran," he said slowly, "didn't I meet you last night near the college some little time after the end of afternoon schools—somewhere about Smith Street, if I remember rightly?"

This question made William and Thomas, who had been watching the duel with breathless interest, give themselves up for lost. But their representative never turned a hair. "Yes, sir," he said brightly. "It was just at the corner."

"It must have been nearly five o'clock, Comoran, was it not?" continued the master.

"I should think it would be about that, sir," Comoran agreed.

"And had you come straight from the college, Comoran?"

"Yes, sir," said Comoran, adding with ap-

parent eagerness to impart information, "I came out by the front door and crossed over to the other side of Leicester Street, and then, I remember, I went——"

"That will do, Comoran," interrupted his questioner, "I want to know whether you were in this room before you left the college?"

"Yes, sir, I was," said Comoran frankly, without letting it appear that he suspected any sinister intention in the question. His accomplices by this time were in a state of nervous collapse, desiring only that their agony might be shortened. The next question made their despair absolute.

"Were you alone, Comoran," said Mr. Colquhoun in a peculiar, silky voice, which every one knew to be dangerous.

"No, sir," said Comoran, still outwardly unmoved.

"*Not* alone, Comoran," repeated Mr. Colquhoun impressively. "May I ask who was with you?"

I don't think, myself, it was quite a fair question, and perhaps Mr. Colquhoun deserved what he got. For Alexander looked up brightly, as though pleased at being able to oblige. "Mr. Tanqueray, sir," he said, and his questioner fairly gasped.

"He'd lost his spectacles, sir," he continued confidentially, "and I stopped behind to help him look for them. I didn't know I was doing anything wrong, sir."

There was just the faintest suspicion of a note of triumph in Comoran's voice as he brought out the trump card, and Mr. Colquhoun did not fail to notice it. The card had certainly been played with considerable skill, but naturally that did not tend to soothe the master. He dismissed Comoran to his place with an angry gesture, and Comoran, on his way back, foolishly winked at the class in general. In moments of success he generally lost his head a little. Mr. Colquhoun noticed the wink, but did not comment upon it. Perhaps he thought it was justifiable, under the circumstances, or perhaps he was too angry to trust himself to inflict any penalty just then. He waited till the end of the hour before he made his countermove. Then, when the bell rang for the morning twenty minutes' break, instead of dismissing the class, he told them to remain in their places. "This piece of mischievous impudence must not go unpunished," he said impressively. "The whole class will remain in now and continue to work out examples, and will do so every morning until the

offender or offenders are brought to justice. Any boy who likes to come to me and assure me on his word of honor that he knows nothing of the matter can go to the playground as usual." He then departed, briefly indicating the fact that he intended to remain in the immediate neighborhood, and that therefore it would be unwise in any member of the class to depart from the line of conduct prescribed, or to seek solace in conversation.

A subdued whistle of indignation accompanied his departing footsteps. "Well, I'm *blowed*," said Potter, who sat next the door, and who was no less remarkable for size than for a particularly deep-rooted dislike for mathematics.

"I vote nobody goes, just to show him," said the boy next to him. McClane was his name, and he also was fairly big. He had red hair, and was remarkable for being the best half-back for his size ever known. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that his extremely silly proposal was received with almost universal favor. The only dissentient was Attwood, the mathematical genius, who had no examples marked wrong, and so felt the penalty more keenly. Attwood was smaller even than Tommy, but very enterprising; there was

something about him that suggested a sharp little fox-terrier.

"What rot," he said, in answer to McClane's proposal. "What on earth's the good of our all stoppin' in if young Comoran did it. I bet he did, 'cos he winked."

This remark naturally attracted general attention to Alexander, who met the gaze of the class with his usual composure, though inwardly extremely uneasy as to the way in which matters were going to develop. Experience had taught him that the safest course with Attwood was to assume the aggressive. "Some beastly little pluggers that get all their examples right," he said firmly and with great emphasis, "seem to get chestier every day."

"Plugger yourself," retorted Attwood, though Mr. Colquhoun would scarcely have endorsed the opinion. He was proceeding to a further protest when a note of warning from Potter, who was keeping guard at the door, cut him short. "Shut up, he's coming back," said Potter; "we've got to do these beastly examples some time, so we may as well do 'em now. We can skin young Commy afterward if he really did it." The class accepted Potter's view of the matter and returned to their studies. When Mr. Colquhoun reached the door all within was

calm and industry, though the hearts of the Black Brothers were still beating rather fast. They had had a narrow squeak, for the whole class might have elected to go out and they have been left alone.

Fortunately, at the end of morning school Potter, the arch enemy, was in trouble, and had to interview a certain Authority, and the rest of the class postponed the proposed inquiry and went home to dinner. Consequently the three brothers were able to hold a short consultation in the class room. Tommy Browne was loud in his expression of admiration at the way Alexander had saved the situation. "You *are* a chap, Alick," he said enthusiastically. "If he'd called me out I'd have gone as red as fire and given the whole show away." William, on the other hand, who was a little jealous, pretended to make light of the exploit. He said it was quite easy and any one could do it on his head.

"Could they!" said Alexander, not unnaturally indignant at being robbed of his just recognition. "I'd just like to see you do it, young Billy."

"It's only because you're anæmic and haven't got any blood," retorted William. "I heard your aunt say so, so you needn't talk." William

lived next door to Alexander, which sometimes gave him an unfair advantage. Alexander did not reply to this offensive remark, but proceeded at once to action. He collared William vigorously, and after a short struggle succeeded in getting him down and kneeling on his shoulders, having taken him rather by surprise. "I'm anæmic, am I?" he said furiously. "I haven't got any blood, haven't I? I'll teach you, you little shrimp!" He punctuated each remark with a vigorous thump. William struggled violently to get free, but without effect, for science teaches us that when once another person has his knees firmly planted on our shoulders it is impossible to remove him without external aid. The wisest thing under such circumstances is to lie still and come to terms.

"Say I'm not anæmic," said Alexander wrathfully, but William only glared at him. "Le' me go, you silly idjut," he gasped, being somewhat winded by the thumps.

"Not till you say I'm not anæmic," said Alexander, and as William for reply only made a more furious struggle, he dexterously doubled up his little finger and squeezed it in such a way as to bring tears into his victim's eyes. And if you doubt whether such an effect can

be produced by means so simple, get some one to double up your little finger and squeeze it. If it doesn't hurt, you may conclude that he doesn't know the trick.

"Now, will you, Billy?" said Alexander, but William only shook his head, being what you might call an extremely obstinate young man. Alexander was just on the point of applying the torture a second time when Tommy, who had been watching the proceedings from the door, suddenly interposed. "Look out," he said; "there is some one coming."

"Shut the door, then, you ass!" said Alexander, who naturally did not want to throw away his advantage.

"He'll hear me if I do," said Tommy; "you'd better look out, he's quite close and it sounds like one of the masters." The look of alarm on his face assured Alexander that it was not, as he had at first suspected, a trick, and he reluctantly released his victim and rose to his feet. He had scarcely done so when Mr. Tanqueray appeared in the doorway.

He eyed the Black Brothers with marked disapproval. "What! here *again!*" he said; "you three boys seem to *live* in this room. What's the matter with you, May?" he added, for William's state of distress was too obvious

to escape even Mr. Tanqueray's observation.

"Nothing, sir," said William stoutly.

"Oh, nonsense," said Mr. Tanqueray, "what have you two been doing to him?"

"Please, sir, we were only playin'," said the loyal William, mopping his eyes.

"He got hurt a little, sir," said Tommy helpfully, "but I don't think it's much."

Mr. Tanqueray paused a moment. "I think I ought to punish you all three severely," he said, "and if I find you here again after school I certainly shall. Now get along at once and don't let me have any more of it."

"Thank you, sir," said all three, with a touch of fervor, and straightway bolted. They did not pause until they got outside, for sometimes the most amiable masters change their minds.

CHAPTER III

A MEETING OF THE BROTHERHOOD AND ITS RESULTS

“**T**HAT was a little bit of all right,” said Alexander when they got outside. “It was jolly lucky it was him.”

“He’s a real decent sort,” said Tommy fervently. “He is the decentest master in the whole place.” William made no contribution to the chorus of praise. He stalked along in silence, his hands in his pockets and a haughty expression on his face. He was obviously meditating on his wrongs.

“Billy’s in a rage,” said Tommy; “you shouldn’t have squeezed his finger so hard.”

“Well, he shouldn’t ’ve called me names, then,” said Alexander. There was an uncomfortable pause. The Black Brothers were at loggerheads at one of the most critical moments of their eventful history, a moment when concerted action was especially necessary.

“I say, make it up, Billy,” said Tommy, who generally acted as peacemaker in the not in-

frequent civil wars. "Aleck's beastly sorry, and we can't go on with the meeting unless you do."

"Chaps that squeeze other chaps' fingers when they're down are simply cads," said William—to the sky, apparently.

"I say, make it up, there's a good chap," said Tommy, offering no comment on the general proposition, "'cos we've got to settle somethin' about what we're goin' to do, and we can't if you don't."

"He's got to say, 'I'm sorry for being a beastly cad,' " said William, still addressing the sky, "and he's got to let me squeeze his finger while I count six."

Tommy sighed and looked pathetically at Aleck as these exacting terms of peace were delivered. The way of peacemakers is hard, and William, as I said, was a desperately obstinate person. However, Aleck was as anxious for peace as anybody, being really grateful for the way William had behaved, and also anxious to go on with the meeting.

"I'll say, 'I am sorry I was a beast,' " he said, "and I'll let him squeeze my finger while *you* count three. But he'll have to say I'm not anæmic."

"But you are," said William, suddenly be-

coming human again; "your aunt said you were; I heard her myself."

"You shouldn't go about saying things you hear people say," said Aleck severely, "and if you're going to go on being nasty about it I'm off."

"I'll say, 'Your aunt said you were anæmic, but perhaps you aren't,' " said William hastily, a little alarmed at the threat, "and Tommy can do the counting, only he'll have to swear not to count too fast, and it'll have to be four instead of three."

Aleck considered for a moment. The prospect of having his finger mangled by William in his present temper was by no means a pleasant one, but it seemed the only way to the altogether desirable peace. So he gave a rather half-hearted assent, and pointed out a side street and an empty shop, in the doorway of which the ceremony of reconciliation might be conveniently performed. Accordingly they crossed over and the two faced each other.

"Now," said Thomas, who stood in the middle, "you first, Billy."

"*His aunt said he was anæmic, but perhaps he isn't,*" said William, tucking up his sleeve and preparing for the squeeze.

"I'm sorry I was a beast," said Aleck, and

held out his left hand submissively, with the little finger bent conveniently for squeezing.

"You've sworn not to count too fast, mind," said William, with a warning glance at Tommy.

"All right," answered Tommy; "fire away—one—two—three—four, let him go!"

In the short space indicated by the above numerals Alexander had described the opening movements of a very fine cake walk dance. When his finger was liberated it went immediately into his mouth. "*Oh, crumbs!*" he said, but a little indistinctly, because of the finger. You see *William knew the trick*.

"It'll only hurt for a second or two," said Tommy soothingly. "We can go on with the meeting now, can't we?"

"We can't have a meeting in the middle of the street; we'd better go into the park for a bit," said William, who had quite recovered his good temper again. They went into the park and sat down on a bench at the foot of the statue of Mr. Sadbrick, the celebrated statesman. Aleck still had his finger in his mouth, and seemed inclined to keep it there. "You needn't pretend it's still hurting," said William, after a pause, "because I know it isn't, and you squeezed mine a lot harder."

"At any rate I didn't blub about it," answered Aleck, a remark which might easily have led to a renewal of hostilities had not the peacemaker Tommy rapidly interposed. "What are we going to do, supposing he says the same to-morrow about going out at recess, if you say you haven't done it?" he remarked suddenly by way of introducing the all important matter. The sentence is a little incoherent, but they understood what he meant, as I hope the reader will.

"The chances are he won't," said William, "'specially as it missed fire to-day. And even if he does, they may not."

"It's that little beast Atty I'm afraid of," answered Tommy. "Any one could see he'd made up his mind it was Aleck, and he'll probably go about telling all the chaps. Do shut up sucking your finger, Aleck, and have a meeting properly."

Aleck, in response, took his finger from his mouth, tucked the injured hand under his arm and gave a whistle of pain.

"I don't believe he can think of anything to say," said William, "and he's only shamming and pretending his finger hurts so's to have an excuse."

"Can't you really think of anything, Aleck?"

said Tommy, in whom anxiety swallowed up every other emotion.

“ ‘Course I can,” said Aleck, “but how can I tell you with my finger aching like a house on fire?” and he replaced it in his mouth.

“Rot!” said William; “I didn’t squeeze it as hard as all that,” but Aleck took no notice.

“It’s an absolutely certain plan,” he continued, wrapping his finger carefully in his handkerchief with occasional exclamations of pain. “It’ll stop us being kept in to-morrow and end the whole thing without any bother.”

“Well, what is it?” said William, whose curiosity was aroused. “If you don’t tell us we shall think it’s all humbug.”

“Don’t you wish you hadn’t squeezed my finger so hard, Billy?” said Aleck gently.

“I’ll say ‘yes,’ ” said William sulkily. He was getting hungry, and knew Aleck’s ways.

“How many examples will you do for me to-night, Billy?” asked Aleck softly.

William squirmed with indignation at this unlooked-for attack, but he was fairly in the toils. “Three,” he said at last, after a severe internal struggle. For his natural impulse was to punch Aleck’s head, and I’m not saying it would have been an altogether regrettable thing if he had.

“Three of the *hardest*?” Aleck continued, “and Tommy’s witness?”

William snorted with indignation, but a spasm of pain ran through Aleck’s finger at the sound, and he tucked it under his arm again. William took the hint. “All right,” he grunted; “I think it’s pretty mean, all the same.”

“And you’ll lend me your pea-shooter next Saturday afternoon, won’t you, Billy?” murmured Aleck. “My finger’s getting much better, and it’s an absolutely safe plan,” he added encouragingly.

Once again the desire to punch Aleck’s head struggled for the mastery in William’s bosom with curiosity to know the plan, and a growing sense of emptiness inside, and once again curiosity and hunger—a formidable coalition—triumphed. He grunted a dissatisfied assent.

And then Aleck unfolded the plan. It was a plan so bold, and yet withal so statesmanlike, that I feel sure the heart of Mr. Sadbrick must have warmed in sympathy beneath his bronze waistcoat as he listened to its unfolding. Possibly, could he have intervened, he would have pointed out that its single weakness lay in its very logical perfection. “Ah, my dear young friends,” he would doubtless have remarked,

“though your plan reveals no inconsiderable astuteness, you have yet to learn the fate that awaits those misguided men who attempt to apply the rules of logic to the practical affairs of life.”

The plan, in outline, took the following shape. Aleck agreed in the main with Tommy's view of the situation, and regarded it as certain that Attwood would adopt the unamiable rôle assigned to him and attempt to get the class to protest in a body. In this he would probably succeed, as not a few members, including Potter, were wont to have recourse to him for aid in their mathematical studies. It was therefore imperatively necessary to prevent the class being kept in during recess the following day.

How was this to be effected? By the simple and ingenious means of greasing the Upper VI blackboard.

If the Upper VI blackboard were greased, the Upper VI would naturally fall under suspicion.

Now it would be impossible for the Upper VI to be kept in during recess, because if they were there would be no one to keep order in the playground. Therefore they would be allowed out as usual. But if they were allowed

out, the Third could not be kept in with any show of justice.

Therefore the Third would be allowed out, too, and thus all fear of exposure would be averted, O. E. F. I have stated the plan in a rather more logical form than that in which Alexander unfolded it, but it is in substance what he said. It sounded so clever and plausible (Alexander's plans generally had at least *that* merit) that neither of his listeners raised any question as to whether it would work or not; for one thing, they were both anxious to get home to dinner. So they proceeded at once to the practical question as to who should do the greasing. Following a long-established precedent, they tossed up for it, and the lot fell on Tommy, who looked very blue and asked, without enthusiasm, where he was to get the candle from. For answer Alexander looked cautiously round and put his hand on his right knee. He carefully unbuckled the strap which terminated his nether garments at that point and produced the necessary instrument. "Jolly good place to hide things," he said. "No one ever thinks of looking there."

"When'm I to do it?" said Tommy rather sulkily, taking the candle end and stowing it away in his satchel. Alexander told him to do

it at the end of afternoon school and to be sure that there was no one hanging about, and to give it a good grease all over. He said they might be perfectly easy in their minds, and that everything would be all right, and there would be no more bother. Tommy sighed, and said he must be getting home to dinner, and William said he must be, too, so the meeting forthwith broke up. I imagine Mr. Sadbrick smiling a sardonic smile at them as they departed.

William and Aleck, as I think I mentioned, lived next door to each other, their families occupying Nos. 5 and 7 Roscommon Street. William's father was Captain May, of the R. M. S. *Bulurwayo*. If you read the shipping news you will often see his name in the papers. William had a good many brothers and sisters, counting himself about half way down the list. One of his brothers had left school, but one (unfortunately) was still there, and in the Upper VI. I say unfortunately, because when William arrived late for dinner his unpunctuality was emphasized by the fact that his brother had arrived in time. Further, his brother (Matthew was his name) was, with singular want of tact, entertaining the family with an account of the greased blackboard epi-

sode, the news of which had rapidly spread all over the school. He even went so far as to say that he shouldn't be surprised if their Willy had had a hand in it, and Mrs. May, from the head of the table, said she hoped to goodness not, as they would have a nice sort of bill coming in if he had. So when William did at last arrive the welcome he received was a somewhat chilly one. He was sent out at once to wash his hands, and informed that he would only have one help of pudding. On returning he was taxed by the inconsiderate Matthew with having greased the board, and instead of telling him to mind his business, he turned red and said nothing at all, which of course rather let the cat out of the bag. Altogether it was a most unsatisfactory dinner, for apart from the fact that William only got one help of pudding, Susannah was sent away from the table for calling Matthew (in a loud stage whisper) a horrid sneak, and Mrs. May thought it probable that the Captain, on his return home, would entirely collapse beneath the weight of his children's wickedness. Every one was relieved when at last James Arthur, the youngest but one, was called upon to say grace.

But as will easily be seen, the situation had become sensibly modified, so far as William was

concerned. For now, if the Upper VI blackboard were greased, Matthew would certainly attribute it to him and think he was trying to wipe off old scores. Further, there was this new financial aspect of the question, which had not hitherto occurred to any of the parties concerned. It would certainly be awkward if a bill for two destroyed blackboards met Captain May on his return home.

He unfolded these perplexities to Aleck after dinner on his way to school, but Aleck made very light of them. He said it was all nonsense to talk about the blackboards being destroyed, because every one knew you could get the grease off at any time with a blotting paper and a hot iron. He said if Mr. Colquhoun had behaved decently instead of going up in the air he had meant to suggest it to him in the morning. As to the danger from Matthew, he made light of that, too. He said you could just tell Matthew to mind his own business, and he would like to see *his* elder brother (he hadn't got one, by the way) trying to interfere with *him*. This last argument William did not find very satisfying. He said it was all very well for Aleck to talk, but if he had to sleep in the same room as Matthew he would probably think differently, to which

Aleck replied that if Matthew tried to lick him he could just begin to yell at the top of his voice and he'd see that he'd soon stop. William did not reply to this, seeing clearly that Alexander (who had only one sister and lived with his aunt) knew nothing of the ways of big families. To behave in such a manner would ruin his reputation forever in the eyes of the kid, besides being altogether unsportsmanlike. But he promised reluctantly to say nothing of these difficulties to Tommy, whom they both knew it would be very easy to persuade to give up the whole business.

Tommy, it should be said, had had no real opportunity of thinking the matter out. He, too, was late for dinner, later than any of them, but then in his home it did not matter much what time you turned up. He had no brothers or sisters at all, and his father had died when he was quite small, and his mother was an artist, quite a distinguished artist. You will see her name in the papers, too, although not quite so often as Captain May's. Look down the list of pictures at any exhibition, and nine times out of ten you will see the name of Mrs. Clementina Browne among them. Tommy was very rightly proud of his mother's skill and reputation, though it was, indirectly, a cause of con-

siderable suffering to him. For Mrs. Clementina was constantly in want of a model, and he sometimes had to do his home work dressed up as a Spanish peasant boy, sometimes even (though I hardly like to say it) as a Spanish peasant girl, or some other absurd and incongruous character. Though he always stipulated that the door should be locked on these occasions, and took care always to sit well out of sight of people passing in the street, he was continually haunted by the fear that some day some of the college boys would pass and see him. I fear Mrs. Clementina hardly realized what a call she was making upon Tommy's devotedness or how his whole soul revolted at these dressing-up performances, though she had conceded the privilege of his wearing long trousers as a sort of set-off; still, he did it, and did it on the whole without much grumbling, which shows, I think, that there was a lot more in Tommy than you might have supposed from the silly things he sometimes did.

On this particular occasion, directly he got inside the house he heard his mother calling from the studio. "Is that my Tummus?" she called. "Come here, my blessing!" That was her way of talking, and if you had told Tommy it was queer he would not have liked it at all.

He went at once, and submitted without a murmur to taking his dinner in a flaxen wig with a large hat perched on the top of it, serving thus the useful purpose of model for an illustration upon which his mother was engaged. Some people might have thought it funny to see him making the sign of the cross before he began, and trying to get the most out of a mutton chop without disturbing the balance of the wig, which, apart from the added weight of the hat, was rather too large, but I think myself it was rather fine. Mrs. Clementina kept on working the whole time, having a great belief in Plasmon biscuits, which can be consumed without all the cumbersome machinery of a dinner table. She kept on talking, too, telling Tommy how particularly beautiful and original this illustration was, and how the author ought to scream with joy when he saw how wonderfully his idea had been grasped, and so on.

Tommy sat gravely through it all, munching his mutton chop, because his mother did not expect any reply when she talked like that; indeed, she often addressed questions to persons who were obviously not present at all, as when she exclaimed, as she often did on finishing a sketch, "And what does Sir Joshua think

of *that*, now?" But it must be admitted that he was considerably upset and looked very glum when his mother told him that she had that morning received a commission for a series of pictures illustrating the history of Little Bo Peep for a children's book, and that she would want him to pose as model that evening. She noticed the look at once. "Oh, Tummus" (she generally called him Tummus), "how *can* you?" she exclaimed. "Think of the shekels, my angel babe, and do it for your poor Ma. Think of the baker, Tummus; think of the wicked price of coal, my blessing," and so on. And Tommy had only looked a little sulky (as who wouldn't?) and said, "Bother!"

But no one should be in a hurry to condemn this excellent lady, or to set her down as one wanting greatly in tact and consideration, for she was fighting a desperately hard and uphill battle. Tommy's father, as I said, was dead, and left practically no money behind him. He had been killed in a motor smash soon after his marriage, so Mrs. Clementina's pictures and illustrations had to pay for everything; for though Tommy had an uncle who was rather rich, she was too proud to take anything but advice from him. There were other circumstances complicating her relations with this

uncle, but as we shall meet him later on, we can put off describing them till then. Artists as a rule are very badly paid, and often enough Mrs. Clementina had a desperate struggle to make both ends meet. She did not tell Tommy much about it, but he partly guessed, and as a rule was very patient and helpful. But he could not help hating having to dress up in this absurd way, and you can understand that Little Bo Peep drove, for the time at least, the blackboard business quite out of his head.

He remembered all about it when, on returning to school, he met Aleck and William, and as there was no way out of it, at the end of the afternoon he went and did it. It was quite easy, because the Upper VI were in the chemical laboratory at the time, and there was no one about. Their blackboard was a very magnificent one, but at the end of the operation it was quite useless for all practical purposes, for Tommy did his work thoroughly. Aleck and William waited for him at the corner of the street, and he returned the candle end and said it was all right and nobody had seen.

Aleck did not look quite so cheerful as he ought to have done, considering that he had had his own way, and when William said, "If it doesn't come off we'll be in a worse hole than

ever," he turned nasty and told him to try and see if he couldn't find something else beastly to say, and went off home by himself in a temper. Tommy and William, thus left alone, looked at each other uneasily.

"I don't believe he thinks it'll work now," said William, with a sort of gulp, which took Tommy rather by surprise. "Beastly little fool, he's always getting us into rows. I wish I'd never been a Black Brother. I wish I'd never seen the rotten old blackboard." William was obviously very much upset.

"What's the row, Billy?" said Tommy kindly. "I thought you wanted to go on with it."

"Well, I didn't, then," said William; "I don't want beastly bills coming in; and my father's coming back next month; and I shan't be let go down to the docks to meet him." William by this time was audibly sniffing.

"I say," said Tommy in alarm, "d' you think they'll send us in bills?"

"Course they will, you silly idjut," said William miserably, "and there'll be two now instead of one, and my father'll be in a most awful rage, and I won't be let go down." William's woes became too great for utterance at this point.

"What'd a blackboard cost, about, d' you think?" said Tommy seriously.

"A jolly lot, I 'spect," said William, who was evidently bent on taking a gloomy view of things. "I dessay two 'd be pretty nearly five pounds. I wouldn't be surprised if it was more."

"It's all right enough for Aleck to talk," he went on; "he's only got his aunt, and she can't say boo to a goose, my mother says she can't. But it's different for me, with my father comin' home and Mat knowin' already."

"It'll be pretty bad for me, too," said Tommy dolefully. "Why on earth didn't we think of it before?"

"I dunno," answered William; "but it won't be so bad for anybody as for me."

"It's all that little Aleck's fault," he continued bitterly, "and I'll tell him, too, you see if I don't."

At this point they reached the spot where their ways home separated, and William nodded and went off in the lowest of low spirits. With a heart only a degree or too less depressed Tommy also turned homeward.

His evening troubles began directly he got in, and he took his tea as Little Bo Peep—an incongruous maiden with trouser ends sticking

out from under her petticoats, but as to the upper part of her, appropriately clad in a Watteau shepherdess costume. It interfered a good deal with his home work, for who could do a French exercise with absurd ribbons sprawling about all over you, and an exacting mother demanding a change of attitude every few minutes. But this was not the worst of it by any means, and if Tommy's face had been included in the drawing the result must have suggested a shepherdess suffering from acute neuralgia or some other severe affliction. This possibility of a bill being sent in weighed upon him terribly, for the soul-destroying effect of bills was a frequent subject of conversation with Mrs. Clementina, and he had come to regard people who send them in as among the wickedest of mankind. Besides, it would make her terribly angry, and though generally very easy going and good tempered, when really upset she could be simply terrible. The more he thought of it the more hopeless the situation seemed, for he shared William's suggestion as to the success of Alexander's scheme. So, as I said, it was a very woe-begone and melancholy shepherdess that sat that evening on the model platform in the studio and tried to learn French verbs and lessons by heart.

The suspense at last grew so unbearable that he began to think how he could get some information as to the real price of blackboards from his mother without letting out the whole secret, and he hit upon an ingenious plan. He began first by talking about the furniture in the studio in a casual way, tactfully leading up to the question of how much it cost. He then worked by natural stages to furniture at school, how much *that* cost. Mrs. Clementina answered rather at random. Some of her figures would probably have startled an upholsterer, but Tommy never doubted their substantial accuracy. When he got to the school-room he naturally did not go straight to the blackboard, but began diplomatically with the benches. "How much would a bench cost, mummy?" he said, and Mrs. Clementina, with a pencil in her mouth, said without a moment's hesitation that she expected a good bench, a really artistic bench, would cost about seven pounds. From benches he passed, after a pause, to wall maps, and then from wall maps to masters' chairs, and from masters' chairs, with a beating heart, at last to blackboards. Mrs. Clementina, who found the inventory a little fatiguing and wished to terminate it, said a blackboard would certainly make a hole in

a ten-pound note. At this awful announcement Tommy gasped and stopped his questions so suddenly that the effect of all his subtle diplomacy was quite destroyed. His mother's suspicions were aroused, and glancing across at Tommy, she saw a confirmation of them in the expression of alarm on his face.

"Tummus," she said, pointing severely at him, "you're up to some mischief, that's what you're up to. Oh, don't tell me, I can see through you like a book. I know what you're going to do, you artful boy. You're going to saw off the leg of a chair so that somebody will sit down on it and be upset." Tommy shook his head, but his mother took no notice.

"It's all very well for you to shake your head, Tummus, but I know better. But now listen to me, my blessing," she continued, laying down her pencil and drawing board. "You mustn't do anything of the sort, you just mustn't. You don't want to worry your poor old mummy, do you, Tummus? You wouldn't like to bring her gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Think of the rates and taxes, my cherub; think of the sinful people who buy pictures and things, and the wicked prices they give! I do assure you, Tummus, that if you bring me any bills for broken chairs and such

like I shall simply collapse, my angel babe, and go and sit in the coal cellar and howl." With which fearful threat she took up her pencil again and went to work.

Tommy kept his face turned away during the course of this remarkable harangue, which explains why Mrs. Clementina did not notice two tears that trickled down slowly and found a resting place on one of the unnecessary ribbons which decorated the person of Little Bo Peep. There was a longish pause in the conversation. "If you're going to be a Bluggins, Tummus," said Mrs. Clementina at last, "you can take off that pretty dress and go to bed."

"I'm not," said Tommy indignantly. Bluggins was Mrs. Clementina's name for a certain celebrated painter (it would never do for me to tell you which one precisely, because of the law of libel), for whose works she had a deeply rooted antipathy, and from his earliest years Tommy had been accustomed to associate all that was morally and physically reprehensible with the name.

"Well, don't look like one, then," said his mother. "Look joyous, my precious blessing. You can do heaps and *heaps* of other things, even if you won't saw off legs of chairs. Can't you put rats in the other boys' desks, and trip

people up with a string, and all that sort of thing? *Anything* that won't cost money, Tummus, but I really can not stand any more bills. Now you're looking it more than ever, my cherub. What *is* the use of my talking?"

"I can't remember these beastly verbs," said Tommy, which was perfectly true. For half an hour at least he had in the intervals of conversation been painfully trying to master the eccentricities of the foolish French verb *aller*, which, as some of us know to our cost, waltzes light heartedly off into a different shape at almost every turn.

"Well, come here and I'll help you, Tummus," said Mrs. Clementina.

"Can't I take off these beastly things?" said Tommy. He wouldn't have said it if he hadn't been so upset.

"Yes, Tummus," said his mother, "take them off. Jump on them, by all means, and tear them up to make Guy Fauxes and cricket balls out of them. Don't mind *me* in the least. *I like it, Tummus.*"

Tommy got down from his throne on the model platform and came over to where his mother was sitting and put his arm round her neck.

"Sorry, mummy," he said.

She gave him a vigorous hug. "You will be a good boy and help your poor ma, won't you, Tummus?" she said, wiping her eyes, and Tommy gave a rather inarticulate promise.

"And you won't bring home any horrid bills, will you, my blessing?" she said, and Tommy, after a moment's hesitation, promised not to. How he was suddenly able to do so I shall explain presently. Then they went to work together at the French verbs, and having to some extent at last overcome them, they had supper together, and Tommy went to bed.

I feel I have given Tommy away rather badly, for no one would like it to be known that he had to dress up in girl's clothes and be called an angel babe. Still, you will never know who Tommy really was, because, dear sir or madam, he lives in a city you are never likely to visit, and so I am going to make a still more intimate revelation. Tommy had once been to a school sodality meeting at which an address of a rather unusual type had been given, for the priest who gave it, among other things, said that whenever he was really in a fix he always went to Our Lady to get him out of it, and she always did. He gave one or two examples of a very striking nature to illustrate the fact. Tommy had been much impressed

by the lesson and its possibilities of practical application, and he proceeded to act upon it with quite striking results. Our Lady, among other things, now, to his own and several other people's surprise, got him through the Oxford Locals. It is true it was only a pass, and not even third class honors, but still he was through, and felt properly grateful. He naturally did not talk about it, but after those results he felt quite sure that you could always rely on Our Lady if you did not ask for unreasonable things.

This saving truth had suddenly flashed across his mind when his mother asked the awkward question about the bill. It was certainly an ugly hole, but it seemed just the sort Our Lady would help you out of, so he boldly made the plunge and staked everything on this means of escape. He explained all this when he said his prayers that night, and though he did not, of course, insist upon any precise plan, he rather suggested that perhaps the best way would be for it never to be found out, and he would gradually save up and pay back the price secretly. Then, by way of acting up to his promise to be a help and not incur unnecessary expense, he carefully folded up his trousers and put them under the mattress to press

out the creases, and after that he went to bed with a fairly easy mind.

When presently his mother came into take away the candle, she brought with her a large crystallized plum. "Open your mouth and shut your eyes and see what'll happen, Tum-mus," she said, and I need make no mystery about what did happen. But if you are a very clever and clear-sighted person you will see that, although she was very fond of Thomas, she did not altogether understand him.

CHAPTER IV

A FREE RIDE

I ONCE knew a boy who played, or rather intended to play, a rather complicated practical joke upon some other boys. The essence of the joke was that at a given point he should pour upon a piece of blotting-paper what seemed to be water, but was in reality a chemical compound giving off a most hideous and overwhelming smell. Unfortunately (through some flaw in the mixing, I imagine), the chemical compound behaved exactly as though it had been really only ordinary water, and gave no smell at all, which made him look as foolish as people generally do under such circumstances.

Now, the three Black Brothers were very much in this position the morning after the events we have just narrated. The Upper Sixth blackboard had been properly greased, and by rights the whole school should have been in a commotion. As a matter of fact, absolutely nothing happened.

They had come to school, all three of them, in a rather uneasy frame of mind, and with

tempers a little uncertain. William was the worst, for he had kept to his intention of telling Aleck what he thought of him, with the result that for the moment they were not on speaking terms. William had had a very bad night, for after they had retired to rest Matthew had entertained him with various highly colored descriptions of what he might expect to happen when the Captain came home. When (very imprudently, it seems to me) he had sought to discover Matthew's views as to the price of blackboards, he found them to be on a scale of more Oriental magnificence than were even those of Mrs. Clementina.

The crisis, of course, arrived when, at the end of the mathematical class, Mr. Colquhoun asked whether the boys who had perpetrated the outrage of the day before had thought better of it and were prepared to give themselves up to justice. A chilling silence alone answered this inquiry, and Mr. Colquhoun snorted with indignation.

"Very well," he said. "*Very* well. The class will stay in as before during the recess, and will continue to do so until the offenders are discovered.

"Please, sir," said Potter, standing up, "may

we go out if we say we haven't had anything to do with it?"

"No, Potter," said Mr. Colquhoun, "no, you may *not*. The class, by its behavior yesterday, has made itself collectively responsible, and will accordingly be kept in until the offenders are brought to justice."

"Please, sir," Potter was beginning, when Mr. Colquhoun interrupted him.

"Sit down, Potter, and go on with your work," he said. "I don't want to hear any more on the subject."

Potter cast an indignant glance in the direction of Alexander and sat down. Fortunately the places of the Black Brothers were at the other end of the room, and well out of reach of Potter's boot, but all the same they felt very uncomfortable. For apart from the fact that Potter was very big, and that, as soon as Mr. Colquhoun had left the room, he intimated in a loud whisper that when he got Alexander outside he meant to skin him alive, they couldn't help feeling that it was a little mean to let the whole class be punished in this way. To make matters worse, Mr. Colquhoun, in one of his visits of inspection, caught Attwood in the act of talking and sent him downstairs to receive what in France I find

they delicately call "a correction." Attwood, not being accustomed to such visitations, came back showing visible signs of distress, and though the Black Brothers, who sat near him, kept their faces buried in their books, every one of his distressful sniffs went through them like a red-hot dart. I don't say it by way of excusing them, but they certainly felt most horribly mean.

Still, self-preservation is the first law of nature, and at the end of the next hour (the last of the morning) all was forgotten in their anxiety to escape the vengeance of Potter. This was not so difficult as might at first sight appear, because the galleries and staircase at this hour were patrolled by members of the Sixth, who suppressed all riotous tendencies with a strong hand (or foot). But putting away their books very slowly, and taking the opportunity of straightening up their desks, they succeeded in getting the room cleared before they ventured out. With the majority of the class the desire to get home to dinner again swayed the desire to investigate the question of Alexander's guilt.

Now, it so happened that the Sixth Form boy on duty in the gallery outside their class room was no other than William's tactless

brother Matthew, and as the trio emerged, looking furtively round for possible Potter ambushes, they almost walked into his arms. Matthew eyed them sternly, and called to his young brother to stop. "Here, kid," he said, and William obediently came. The other two went on, not being to the same extent under the domination of Matthew.

"You've let those chaps be kept in again, Billy," he said severely. William made a reply, the only audible words in which were, "'n business."

"It *is* my business," said Matthew magisterially. "I've got to see that you don't behave like a dirty little bounder, Billy! When are you going to own up?" William, for answer, tried to bolt, and was promptly collared and treated to a mild (quite mild) kick. "You can't get away from *me*, Billy, so don't try," said Matthew. "Now, just you listen. If you don't own up this afternoon, I'll lick you to-night, and go on every night till you do. See? With the strap off the governor's biggest portmanteau. *Now* you can cut off."

William did cut off, but in scarcely a cheerful frame of mind, for he knew Matthew, and he knew that particular strap. He found the

other two in the hall earnestly gazing at the notice board. There was nothing on it of exceptional interest, but you were liable to be moved on if you hung about in the hall without any particular reason, for the hall was patrolled by a greater Authority even than a member of the Sixth.

"Potter's waiting at the corner of Smith Street with about half the class," said Aleck, as he came up to them; "we're trying to tire'm out."

"*He's looked at us twice,*" said Tommy, in an awestruck voice, meaning not Potter, but the Authority already referred to.

"Well, copy something off the board, then," said Aleck, who was never at a loss for an expedient, and he proceeded to fumble in his pocket for a piece of pencil. The situation was a critical one, for the numbers in the hall were lessening every moment, and it looked as though they would soon be left alone there with the Authority, and if they were asked questions they could give no reasonable explanation as to why the notice board possessed so extraordinary a fascination for them or why they were all three carefully writing down the statement, "Library subscriptions are now due and should be paid at once to Fr. Genicot."

From what was thus rapidly becoming an impossible situation they were rescued by the master who has more than once in this narrative played the amiable part of guardian angel. Mr. Tanqueray, whose lot seemed in some mysterious way to be bound up with that of the Black Brethren, at this juncture suddenly hove in sight. He was wearing a hat and carrying a bag, and evidently making for home and lunch.

It was Aleck, as usual, who first grasped the possibilities of the situation. Hastily stowing away his pencil and paper, he marched straight up to Mr. Tanqueray, and politely raising his cap, said: "Please, sir, did you find your spectacles all right?"

Mr. Tanqueray looked a little surprised, for the episode of the spectacles had quite escaped his memory. "Oh, yes, thank you, Comoran," he said. "I expect I did. I generally do, sooner or later, you know. Very tiresome, isn't it, to have to wear such things?"

"Yes, sir, it must be," said Comoran sympathetically.

William, who had grasped his leader's strategy, ran to the door and politely held it open. Mr. Tanqueray was a little puzzled at these unusual marks of devotion, but thought

no evil, being, as I said, of an unsuspecting turn of mind.

Once out in the street Aleck took up his position on one side and Tommy on the other. William, whose services as a door opener had placed him at a disadvantage, was in the place of danger on the outside. Mr. Tanqueray was so short-sighted that one of his escort might well have been cut off in passing through the Potter country and he not notice it. However, he managed to secure Mr. Tanqueray's bag, and so made himself reasonably safe.

There was nothing in the street to suggest the presence of a bloodthirsty enemy, for the simple reason that Potter and his men were lying in ambush round the corner. According to *their* plan, Aleck was to have walked into their arms, to have been seized and dragged down Back Seymour Street (a conveniently quiet thoroughfare) and spanked until he promised to own up, Potter having thoughtfully brought with him an efficient spanking instrument. Their fatal mistake had been that by looking too unguardedly round the corner they had let the Black Brothers into the secret, and prepared the way for their own discomfiture.

Nevertheless, as they approached the corner,

the hearts of the Brethren began to beat rather fast. They had up to this point managed to keep the conversation going on the subject of spectacles. Alexander volunteered the information that his aunt wore spectacles, and Thomas had supplemented it by the statement that his mother didn't, and hoped she never would. William's contribution had been the expression of an opinion that to be a sailor you had to have good eyesight. Mr. Tanqueray had smiled amiably several times, but said nothing of moment, and as they approached the corner conversation died away, for the simple reason that no one could think of anything else to say.

As they swept majestically round it William suddenly held out Mr. Tanqueray's bag before him as a sort of talisman, and Aleck said in an audible voice, "It's a very fine day, sir, isn't it?" Their triumph was complete. Instead of the contemplated furious onslaught, the waiting enemy recoiled before them and stood in two disorganized rows sheepishly raising their caps. Mr. Tanqueray acknowledged the salute, and Alexander, dropping a very little way behind, did so, too. Perhaps it would have been wiser not to, but, as I said before, Aleck generally lost his head a little in mo-

ments of exceptional prosperity. The indignation of the enemy was deep, but unexpressed.

"Those were some of our boys, were they not?" said Mr. Tanqueray as they passed out of the zone of danger; "they ought to have gone home before this."

"Yes, sir," answered Alexander mildly. "I expect they'll be late for dinner if they don't hurry up." He glanced furtively over his shoulder, and saw to his alarm that Potter was following. He caught Potter's eye, and Potter showed him the instrument with a menacing gesture.

"I'm afraid *I*, too, must hurry up," said Mr. Tanqueray, glancing at his watch. "In fact, I think I'll take this tram. I'd no idea it was so late." A tram had just appeared at the end of the street, and Mr. Tanqueray halted to wait for it. Potter halted, too, at a safe distance.

Now, the proper thing for the Black Brothers to have done at this point was just simply to have bolted. They should have said good-bye to the escort which had stood them in such good stead and made a run for it; they had start enough to be fairly sure of getting clear. But instead of that they waited meekly for the tram to arrive, and while they did so three

of the pursuing party crossed over the street and took up their position lower down, so as to cut off their retreat. They only noticed this just as the tram came up.

Mr. Tanqueray took his bag from William and stepped lightly on board. Then, perhaps touched by the unwonted attentions of which he had been made the object, he turned round and addressed them.

"This tram any good to you, boys?" he asked; "I'll stand you a pennyworth if you like."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said all three in one breath, and clambered after him. A moment later they shot past the baffled enemy, who had to stand feebly by and see them vanish. It was another ecstatic moment, but Aleck did not, as his first impulse prompted him to do, wave his hand at Potter, because he suddenly realized that though the immediate danger had been escaped, another difficulty had presented itself.

For the tram, with all three of them, was proceeding at the lightning speed at which electric trams do travel in precisely the wrong direction. They were being carried away from dinner, with all its solemn obligations, and there was no escape. Tommy and William,

who were sitting together behind Mr. Tanqueray and Aleck, debated the situation in whispers, and William remembered with uneasiness his shortcomings of the day before. Still, they had to let Mr. Tanqueray have his money's worth, and so they had to sit still and watch the streets pass by, the streets which they would soon have painfully to retrace. Alexander, in front of them, had returned to the subject of spectacles, and was asking a number of more or less intelligent questions.

To their relief Mr. Tanqueray got off before the whole pennyworth was up. "You can go on for quite a long way yet," he said cheerfully, as he wished them good-by, "as far as the Carnegie Library, if you like." They thanked him with as much enthusiasm as they could muster, and, directly he had disappeared from sight, descended hastily and dropped off the tram. It might have been worse, but considering that they had started late, it was pretty bad. William was the one principally concerned, and it was mostly for William's sake that the other two were unhappy. Alexander could always manage his aunt, and he had an angelic sister who kept things warm for him, however late he arrived. Tommy's

mother seldom even noticed unpunctuality, however exaggerated. But in the May household Spartan discipline ruled, and loitering on the way home from school was a crime to which tradition had affixed a very definite penalty. This fact was well known, and Alexander generously offered to stand William a tram back.

"It's no good," said William dolefully; "they only go every quarter of an hour. I'll just have to sprint." The other two ran with him, but in spite of their utmost efforts William only arrived, scarlet in the face and perspiring from every pore, as the last relics of what had once been a lordly milk rice pudding were disappearing. Alexander had nothing worse to face than a mild remonstrance. "Really, Alexander, I think it's *very* inconsiderate of you not to try *at least* to get home before we've *quite* finished dinner," said his aunt, glancing at him over her spectacles with mild disapproval. Mrs. Clementina, who, as usual, was hard at work in the studio with a plate of Plasmon biscuits beside her, said nothing more biting than, "Tummus, my angel, aren't you just a teeny-weeny bit late to-day?" But William met with a very different fate. Before the whole table he was given a severe lecture on the evils of

unpunctuality, was reminded that the same thing had happened only yesterday, and was informed that he would be given a letter to take to Fr. Genicot when he went back to school. The younger members of the family stared at him with awe-struck eyes, as at one who bore the seal of doom. The sinister meaning of "a letter" was well understood. The elder ones (all girls except Matthew) conversed in undertones upon indifferent topics, and seemed entirely callous. Only Susannah was sympathetic, and furtively passed her pocket-handkerchief to William under the table, seeing with feminine acuteness that his own, from much mopping, was in a state to call forth further unfavorable comment. William made no attempt at a defense, being at once winded and anxious to make the most of the small possibilities of dinner which remained. But after dinner the letter was duly written and delivered to the offender, who received it in sulky silence. "And don't you let me find you've forgotten to give it, or any nonsense of that sort, young man," said his mother, shaking a warning finger.

Outside in the passage, as he came out, Susannah was waiting for him. "There's about half a tube full of shaving salve in father's

“dressing-room,” she said breathlessly. “I’ll bag it for you, if you like, Billy dear. Mat *always* used to when he was in your class when he got a letter. He used to say it stopped the hurting straight off. Conny told me he did. Nobody’ll notice it’s gone, and if they do, it won’t be you.” Susannah spoke hurriedly, and if you find some of her expressions are not quite ladylike, you must remember she had a good many brothers. The hurry was due to the fact that the convent school attended by the girls of the May household was farther away than the college, and so they had to start earlier. Even as she spoke the voice of an elder sister could be heard expostulating from the hall. “*Susannah,*” it said, “*are* you coming or *are* you not. I shan’t wait another moment.”

William did not meet the offered service with the gratitude it deserved. “D’you think I care about cracks,” he said scornfully. “Give it to Mat and tell him he’s a silly funk. You’d better cut off or *you’ll* get something for being late. Don’t be a little silly, Susy,” he said more kindly, seeing an ominous quiver about his sister’s lips. “There’s nothing to make a fuss about. I’ve had ’em hundreds of times before without turning a hair.” Susannah did not answer, but gave him a sudden hug and dis-

appeared downstairs. A moment later the front door banged and the female detachment had departed. William felt he had vindicated the dignity of his sex, and was rather pleased with himself on the whole.

He had to suffer the humiliation of being handed over to Matthew to see that he did not loiter on the way back to school, but this was not altogether a misfortune, as with Matthew he was at least safe from Potter outrages. Though Alexander was the one chiefly sought by the Potter gang, the three Black Brothers were so generally known to be universal partners that it was quite possible that their vengeance would fall upon any one of them if they caught him alone. With Matthew he was safe, for though Matthew might lick you on occasion himself, he would not let any one else do it. Still, it was an unpleasant experience, for Matthew met a Sixth Form friend on the way, and made William walk a yard or two in advance, so that their conversation might not be interrupted by the presence of a juvenile listener. "I have to see this kid doesn't act like a fool," he said by way of explanation to his friend, and without any intention of indulging in a *jeu d'esprit*. This was doubly annoying, for William had intended to address

some diplomatic questions to Matthew with a view to finding out whether he had heard of the greasing of the Upper Sixth blackboard, and what the explanation of the total and unmitigated failure of Aleck's plan had been.

CHAPTER V

ALEXANDER AT BAY

THE conscientious Matthew saw his charge to the door of Fr. Genicot's office, and William duly delivered the letter and was told to come back at half-past four, which was no more than he expected. He waited a little while in the hall in hopes of seeing Tommy and Aleck before school, for, as the careful reader of this narrative will have noticed, the Black Brothers had been unable to hold a proper meeting since the reunion at the foot of Mr. Sadbrick's statue. Things had been going steadily from bad to worse since then, and some new plan of action was urgently needed. He waited as long as it was safe to do so, but in vain, for Tommy and Aleck had taken the precaution of coming a little late with a view to avoiding being waylaid by the now infuriated enemy.

The class that afternoon was taken by an extremely alert and sharp-sighted master, so that, although the three Black Brothers sat together, they found it inexpedient to attempt to hold any sort of communication. Alex-

ander spent most of the time in thinking how to escape Potter after school, and came to the conclusion that the only possible course was to make a run for it, and if possible get on a tram again. You could not be sure of getting a master to act as convoy a second time, and Potter was so obviously bent upon vengeance that it would be hopeless to try to tire him out by waiting. As he (Alexander) was the one principally sought, he determined for once to leave the two others to shift for themselves; so when, toward the end of the last hour, William took advantage of the master's back being turned to whisper hurriedly, "What you going t' do?" he whispered back the single word "scoot," and when the end came, he scooted, leaving books and everything behind him. This gave him a slight start, and fortune again favored him in that Potter was called up and kept talking to the master for about a minute. Yet, in spite of his having strained his scooting powers to the utmost, he had not got to the corner of Smith Street before they were on his track and catching him up hand over hand. Potter was leading, for, as I said, he was bigger than the rest, and had correspondingly longer legs, but close behind him was Attwood, and behind them again Jeffer-

son, Riley, and Smart. At the sight of them Aleck spurted for all he was worth, and tore round into Smith Street at a breakneck pace, wildly hoping that a tram would be going up or down. But trams, as every one knows, never are going up or down when you want them to be, though they mock you by their frequency when you don't, and so naturally Smith Street showed not a sign of one. There was still hope, however, for if he could manage to keep his lead, sooner or later one must certainly come along, when suddenly from Great Seymour Street in front of him emerged McClane, who was only a size smaller than Potter, and equally bent on vengeance. Alexander had quite forgotten that there was a way into it from the college, and that his retreat could in this way be cut off. He paused for a moment at the sight, saw that it was impossible to get past McClane, and then deliberately bolted across the street and into the first shop he came to.

If he had had time to make a selection it was certainly not the one he would have chosen. He had not had the opportunity of looking at the outside, but the inside revealed the fact that it was an establishment devoted to the sale of ladies' hats. Whichever way you looked you

saw nothing but hats, some of them on the tops of brass rods, some in glass cases, but everywhere hats, not a thing which you could ask for a pennyworth of anywhere. Already it was too late to draw back, for outside, gazing earnestly into the window (which also contained hats) he saw his enemies assembled in force. They thought that at last they had run their quarry to earth.

It was a very awkward situation for Alexander, as every one will admit. He had only sixpence with him, and part of that would be wanted for the tram, supposing he were lucky enough to get it. Fortunately, he had a minute or two's respite, for the shop was empty when he entered it, and it was only after an interval that a most elegant young lady appeared, asking politely what she could do for him. In that interval Aleck had had a brilliant idea. He remembered having read of a man who went into an ironmonger's shop, and by way of a joke asked for a pound of tea, pretending to be deaf, so that they couldn't make him understand that they didn't keep it. Why should not he do the same? He could go on pretending to be deaf until he saw a tram pass, and then make a desperate rush and perhaps get on board. However, when the young lady

arrived he found that it was one of those plans which look all right until you come to try them. He forgot to take into account the fact that the man in question had been a celebrated comic actor (I fancy it was the late Mr. Toole), and that even Mr. Toole could probably hardly have managed it if he had been winded by a long run. So when the young lady, with an engaging smile, said, "What can I do for you?" he said nothing, but pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his face with it.

"You seem rather hot," said the young lady. "Have you been running?"

"Yes, miss," answered Aleck; "I'm a bit puffed," he added, still mopping his face.

"So it seems," said the young lady. "You must have been in a great hurry."

"I was," said Aleck truthfully, with a furtive glance at the window. They were still there. There was a pause.

"Won't you sit down?" said the young lady politely, and Aleck thanked her and took a seat. It was so high that his feet didn't touch the ground, and this made him feel uncomfortable. The only idea which occurred to him at the moment was to ask for a pennyworth of ribbon, but apart from the fact that he wasn't sure whether ribbon was sold in pennyworths,

he felt intuitively that the request would not be welcomed. So he just sat still and said nothing, which under the circumstances was much the wisest thing he could have done.

There was another longish pause. The young lady went to one of the many hats and patted it coquettishly. She twisted the label, which bore the legend, "Epinglé Bonnet, sale price 39/6," a fraction of an inch to one side, as though she wished to call Alexander's attention to it. "Perhaps they sent you out to buy something," she suggested at last.

Alexander again made no answer, and looked feverishly outside for a tram.

"A piece of elastic, perhaps," she continued cheerfully, "or was it a hat pin?"

"No, not exactly," said Aleck, wondering what a hat pin would come to. It sounded inexpensive, but you never know, and he did not like to risk it.

"Well, what was it, my dear?" she said, with a touch of impatience. "You didn't run all this way for nothing, surely?"

"No, miss," said Alexander, with perfect truth.

"Can't you *remember* what it was?" she said sympathetically. "Come, now, think—some tulle or chiffon, or a veil, or some ospreys?"

Was it genius in Aleck or something in the tone of her voice that told him he had to deal with a romantic soul? I don't feel competent to decide, but certain it is that he slipped down from his seat, and going up to his questioner (Miss Rose Gibbons was her name; we shall not meet her again, so I may as well say that she *was* a romantic soul), he whispered confidentially, "Those chaps are after me," and pointed to the window.

Miss Gibbons glanced in the direction indicated, and saw appearing above the summit of a smart lace Tegal hat trimmed with a straw bow of contrasting colors, 48/9 (I quote from the ticket), the face of the infuriated Potter. Then she looked at Alexander, who, as I said in the beginning, had a pale face and yellowish curly hair, and was on the whole not a bad looking boy. The contrast at once appealed to her sympathetic soul. "What, all those great big fellows!" she said. "What a *shame!*"

Alexander mournfully nodded his head. "They're much bigger'n me," he said pathetically.

"Ugh, the brutes!" said Miss Gibbons indignantly. "The great hulking cowards! I'll soon send them about their business, and she went to a speaking tube and called through it,

"Tom," she said, "I want you up here for a minute."

"If I could get on to a tram I should be all right, miss," said Alexander, delighted at the turn things were taking.

Miss Gibbons made no reply, but going to the window, shook her head ferociously. What response was made to the menacing gesture I can not precisely say, but it added to the lady's indignation. "Impudence!" she exclaimed wrathfully. "I'll teach them."

At this moment a youth in shirt-sleeves appeared at the door at the back of the shop.

"Tom," said Miss Gibbons with great dignity, "go and fetch a constable."

"A what, miss?" said Tom, who did not strike one as being a very intellectual type. Alexander's eyes opened with astonishment. This was more than he had bargained for, a good deal.

"A policeman, Tom," said Miss Gibbons; "an officer. There is generally one standing at the corner of the street. Ask him to be quick."

"Yes, miss," said Tom, eyeing Aleck with a grin and evidently under the impression that he was to be taken up for shop-lifting. He shuffled off on his errand, and once more Alexander and the lady were left alone.

"What are you goin' to do?" said Aleck in an awestruck voice.

"Never you mind, my dear," answered Miss Gibbons. "You leave it all to me. I'll teach them, the impudent little wretches. What's your name, my love?" she asked, after a pause.

"Alexander Comoran," said Aleck sulkily. He naturally didn't like being talked to as though he were an infant in arms, and put as much resentment into his tone as he dared.

"Alexander!" cried Miss Gibbons enthusiastically. "What a pretty name! I suppose they call you Aleck, now?"

"They do," said Alexander shortly, hoping fervently that the policeman wouldn't be very long.

"Do you know, Aleck," said Miss Gibbons, with sweet confidence, "I've got a cousin named Alexander. Just the same name as you—*Alexander*. Isn't that funny?"

It did not seem funny in the least to Aleck, so he made no answer.

"He's not a little boy like you," continued Miss Gibbons, piling insult on insult; "he's a great big man, ever so big. What are you going to be when you're a big, big man?"

"Dunno," said Aleck. It was getting beyond endurance and he had wild thoughts of

flight. The worst that Potter could do wouldn't be more appalling than this.

"The same as daddy, perhaps," continued Miss Gibbons with growing tenderness, and quite oblivious to the fact that every word was a dagger plunged into her victim's writhing soul. "Or a jolly Jack Tar and sail the briny sea, or a brave, brave soldier man, I shouldn't wonder." At this point the policeman mercifully arrived, escorted by Tom. He entered and saluted Miss Gibbons respectfully.

"Officer," said that lady with great dignity, "would you be so kind as to step to the window?"

The officer stepped to the window, and one of the waiting enemies blew him an affectionate kiss over the bank of hats between them. The officer frowned.

"Those boys," said Miss Gibbons, "have been standing out there for the last half hour behaving in the most odious manner, constable."

"I'll move 'em hon," said the officer laconically.

"It's a pity, *I* think," continued the lady with rising indignation, "that respectably dressed boys shouldn't know how to behave themselves better. I should just like their

mothers to know how they've been carrying on, that's all."

"I'll move 'em hon," said the officer, "at wunst."

"*Ragged* boys I can understand," continued Miss Gibbons with asperity; "they want a good sound thrashing, every one of them, and if I were their master they'd get it, too. Impudent little wretches!"

"I'll move 'em hon," repeated the officer, "immediate."

"Do, officer," said Miss Gibbons, "and give them a warning not to come annoying respectable people another time."

The officer stepped to the door, but the crowd had anticipated his desire, and had already moved on of their own accord. To meet a policeman on equal terms it is necessary, as is well known, to be wearing a top hat. Failing this, it is always wiser to retire when requested.

"I've moved 'em hon, miss," said the officer, re-entering the shop, "and I'll keep a heye on 'em."

"Thank you, officer," said Miss Gibbons. "Perhaps you would be so kind as to see this little boy safely on to a tram. The young ruffians have been molesting him, too."

"I will, miss," he said; "I wish you a good afternoon, miss. Come along with me, Tommy."

Alexander rose with alacrity, greatly relieved in mind on several points. He had been half afraid at first that Miss Gibbons was going to give them all in charge, which would have led to complications. As it was, things could not have turned out better.

"Oh, Aleck," said Miss Gibbons reproachfully, "you don't mean to say you're going away without saying good-by?"

Alexander blushed a little. In his anxiety to escape he had forgotten the debt of gratitude he owed his protector. He held out his hand rather sheepishly and said, "Thank you very much." Then a cold fear suddenly invaded him as he saw a last and crowning outrage being prepared.

There was no escape, and it happened. I have given Tommy away (on the whole a more deserving character), so I am not going to spare Alexander. In spite of his efforts to get under cover of the officer, Miss Rose Gibbons put her arm round his neck and kissed him affectionately on the forehead. Alexander emerged from the shop with a face the color of beetroot and escorted by the policeman. On the

whole he would certainly have suffered less if he had been spanked by Potter. And if the romantic Miss Gibbons wove Aleck into her dreams, as I imagine she did (he probably returned as a fair-haired youth at some appropriate moment to tell her that he had never ceased to cherish the memory, and so on), it would have been well if she could have known that Alexander's dreams of her were of the most ferocious and blood-stained character. But perhaps on the whole it is better that we should not know how we figure in other people's dreams.

CHAPTER VI

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS

TOMMY and William made no attempt to follow Alexander when he scooted, William because of his sinister appointment at half-past four, and Tommy because he wanted to unfold a plan he had been hatching slowly ever since the evening before, and to get at Aleck in his present outlawed position seemed out of the question. So Tommy went down with William and waited outside the place of execution, and afterward accompanied William to the washing place, where, after stamping about for a little while and blowing on his hands and saying it was a beastly swindle, and he didn't see why he should always be the only one dropped on, William gradually became the William of every-day life again and amenable to reason. Then Tommy, who to the uninstructed observer might have been thought to have remained a callous (though not uninterested) spectator of his friend's sufferings, but who had in reality done everything to show his sympathy that custom allowed, which wasn't very much, proposed they should have a meet-

ing and settle what they were going to do about the blackboards.

“Oh, blow the rotten blackboards,” said William with great energy. “I hate the very sight of the beastly things, I tell you. It is all that little ass Aleck and his silly footling plans.”

“That’s all right,” said Tommy, “but we’ve got to do something, Billy. We can’t go on letting all the chaps be kept in, even if we’re never found out.”

They were out in the street by this time, and William had his hands deep in his pockets and was evidently thinking hard. “If it weren’t for the bill coming and blackboards costing such a lot,” he said at last slowly, “I’d own up, Tommy, I would really. I’m sick of the whole thing, and besides they generally let you off lighter if you own up. Aleck might swear till he was black in the face, but I would.”

“I would, too,” said Tommy, “if it wasn’t for the bills.”

“You’ll catch it, too, will you?” said William with considerable interest. Tommy was ordinarily very reticent about his home affairs, and never asked any one to his house to tea for reasons which to the reader should now be pretty obvious.

"I wouldn't exactly catch it," said Tommy, "but I promised last night I wouldn't get any bills sent in."

"Well, you *are* a chap," said William. "How are you going to stop 'em sending in bills if they want to?" Tommy did not answer, and William at once scented a plan and became insistent. "I b'lieve you know a way," he said; "you might tell me, Tommy. I've always told you things, and I'll keep it dark if you like."

Tommy thought a moment. "Will you swear solemnly never to tell anybody?" he asked, and William professed himself positively eager to do so. Tommy's hesitation made him surer than ever that he had a plan of extraordinary subtlety and acuteness up his sleeve. William generally found it impossible to invent plans himself, and had a correspondingly increased appreciation of them in others.

"Swear especially not to tell Aleck," said Tommy, and William did on the spot.

"Swear you won't laugh at it," said Tommy, who, now that he had committed himself, wished he hadn't and found it impossible to go on.

"I swear I won't laugh at it," said William. "Do buck up, Tommy," he added, never

dreaming of the desperate straits in which Tommy was floundering.

For now for the first time Tommy realized what he had let himself in for, and to proceed seemed quite impossible. He would have to tell William about his belief that Our Lady would help you out of difficulties, and about his prayer, and William would certainly think him soft, even if he did not laugh. Tommy and William had known each other a good while and been through many adventures together, but their knowledge of each other had been so far all on the outside. Now, for the first time they would, so to speak, come into touch on the inside. Being young, Tommy thought that what you see of people from the outside was all there is to be seen, and what William looked like from that point of view I have already briefly indicated in the first chapter of this book. Now, if this explanation does not succeed in making you understand why Tommy was horribly embarrassed and up a tree, nothing will.

“Hurry up, Tommy, let’s have it,” said William, getting impatient, but Tommy only said, “Have you got to go straight home at once?”

“I can stop out till six,” said William. “Is it an awfully long plan?”

"N-not exactly," said Tommy, searching eagerly for a means of escape. Let's go into the park for a bit. They went into the park, which they happened to have just reached, and sat down on the same seat at the foot of Mr. Sadbrick's statue. The coincidence is explained by the fact that it was the seat nearest to the particular gate by which they entered.

"This is the same seat where we sat before," said Tommy irrelevantly, but William only grunted. "Get on; we don't want to be here all night."

"You sat there and I sat here, and Aleck sat the other side of you," continued Tommy doggedly.

"I know we did," answered William. "Has that got something to do with the plan?" he added hopefully.

"No," answered Tommy. "I say, Billy, d'you mind if I don't tell you, after all?"

"Why not?" said William. "I s'pose you think I'll squeal."

"No, I don't," said Tommy.

"I wouldn't, really, Tommy," said the other. "You can't say I ever have."

Tommy didn't answer, from the not very exalted reason that he hoped William would lose his temper. And ordinarily he would have done

so undoubtedly, and the ending would have been a disedifying episode calling for the intervention of the park-keeper. This evening, however, his cares were weighing upon him so heavily that eagerness to hear the plan swallowed up every other emotion. There was a long pause, during which Tommy made holes in the gravel with his heel and felt rather mean.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" said William at last.

"No," said Tommy.

"You *might*, Tommy," said William without any temper, rather sorrowfully in fact. "I've always told you things," he added in a tone of protest.

"You'd only laugh at it," said Tommy by way of defense.

"I wouldn't," said William; "I swear I wouldn't—not if it's ever so silly."

"Yes, you would," said Tommy persistently. "I *know* you would."

"You can't know without trying," said William. "I bet you a penny I won't," he added with a touch of inspiration.

"I got through the Oxford Locals by praying to Our Lady, and putting up a candle," said Tommy desperately.

"So did I," said William; "I put up three candles—the penny sort," he said.

"I did it because of what Father Smith said at the sodality lecture," said Tommy.

"So did I," said William. "At least I did partly. My father says prayers to Our Lady," he went on; "he says she got his ship off a sand-bank once, and he always says the rosary when there's a fog. But what's that got to do with the plan?"

"Father Smith says she always got him out of holes without any bother," said Tommy, greatly relieved at finding the underneath-the-surface William so different from what he had expected.

"I dessay," answered his companion. "We always say the rosary every night for my father to come home safe."

"Do you really, Billy?" said Tommy, quite astonished at this revelation of unsuspected piety. "I say it sometimes for my father, too. He's dead, you know."

"Is he?" answered William, feeling that somehow he was getting to know Tommy better than ever before, and liking the feeling. "I'm *beastly* sorry."

"That's one reason," said Tommy, continuing, and turning a little red, "why I promised

not to get any bills sent in, 'cos my mater hasn't got much tin, and she asked me not to. Don't you think yourself it's the sort of hole Our Lady would pull you out of, Billy?"

"You bet," answered William. "I wouldn't be too sure, all the same," he continued. "Mat says letting the chaps be kept in's about the lowest down trick he's ever heard of."

"I've thought of that," answered Tommy eagerly; "I said a prayer to Our Lady last night about it, and I went to Mass at our church at home this morning, and put up a candle, 'cos I've got a most ripping idea."

"Good lad," murmured William, highly interested. There was going to be a plan after all.

"My mother said blackboards cost about ten pounds, but I don't believe they do really. I got a preparatory kid to go to the porter this morning and ask how much, and he said a matter of thirty shillings. If that's all they cost we might put part of the money on the master's desk with a letter to say what it's for. They'd probably stop keeping the chaps in if we did that."

"We might ask him to in the letter," suggested William, who seemed taken by the idea.

"We might," Tommy agreed. "And even if they go on keeping 'em in, when we've paid off a certain amount we could own up, because if it was only a little they probably wouldn't send in any bill, and if they did it wouldn't matter so much."

"How much do you think we ought to put," asked William, "and how are we going to get it?"

"The more we put," said Tommy decisively, "the sorrier they'll think we are. Haven't you got any saved up?"

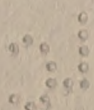
"In the savings bank I have," said William, "but you can't get it out without a letter and all sorts of bother, and besides, my mother's got the book, and she'd want to know what I wanted it for."

"I've got five bob in a money box," said Tommy, "that will do to begin with, and I vote we make Aleck pony up a bit."

"Rather," said William. "He began it, and I expect he can get as much as he likes out of his aunt, and he's got a big sister as well."

"If he raises five, that'll be ten bob—which isn't so bad," said Tommy. "Can't you raise *anything*, Billy?"

"I might borrow some from my sister," answered William. "I know she's got some in her



money box, and she'd probably let me have it. But she'd want it back."

"We'd pay it back, all right," said Tommy; "the main thing is to get it. If we could raise fifteen bob by to-morrow it ought to make it all right."

"It is an awful lot," said William thoughtfully, "but it's better than having bills sent in."

"Why're you so awfully anxious not to get a bill?" asked Tommy, who was also conscious that a new intimacy had grown up between them, and liked the feeling. "Would you get hammered or something?"

William shook his head. "It's something I promised my father," he said. "I'll tell you, if you like, Tommy. I wouldn't tell everybody, but I will you."

"Good old Billy," murmured Tommy appreciatively.

"It was something I promised him just before he sailed this trip. Me and Mat went down to the bar with the steamer and came back with the pilot, 'cos it was on a half holiday. He made Mat go out of the cabin, so I was in there alone with him." William's face was getting pinker and pinker, and he was beginning to speak in a gulpy sort of voice.

"Good old Billy," murmured Tommy again.

"He said our schoolin' was costin' an awful lot, and that they said I wasn't doin' any work, and I hadn't been down to meet him for two trips running. We aren't let go down to meet him if we get into rows. See?"

Tommy nodded.

He said, "You'll keep straight this trip, won't you, old man, and generally he only calls the big ones 'old man,' and me and Jimmy 'kid'—and I promised I would, and he said he should look out for me next time he came into port. Then the steward came, and said they were dropping the pilot and I had to go. See?"

Tommy nodded. "If a bill comes in you won't be let go down?" he said.

"Not a chance," answered William, "and besides he'd be told about it, and he'd think it awfully mean after his telling me about the schoolin' costin' a lot. Besides, I haven't really been working any better, I don't think; I meant to, but I haven't. You haven't noticed any difference, have you?"

"No, I haven't," said Tommy truthfully. "But you might brace up a bit now; there's nearly a month," he added. "It might all come right if you made a try, besides saying some prayers."

"I think I will," answered William. "Have you got a penny on you?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "D'you mean because you bet you wouldn't laugh?"

"I'll let you off that, because you didn't say you'd taken it on," said William. "But it might be a good thing to stick up another candle."

Tommy nodded. "St. Stephen's is just over the other side of the park—we might put it there," he said. "Nobody will see us."

They got up together and departed, and this time I have no idea what Mr. Sadbrick's reflections would have been, supposing he had overheard the conversation. I imagine it would have been altogether beyond him. They proceeded for some time in silence, when William said suddenly:

"I say, Tommy."

"What?" said Tommy.

"Why did you make such a fuss about telling me your plan?"

Tommy turned a little red. "I thought you'd think me soft," he said; "I'm awfully glad I told you now."

"There's nothing soft in praying to Our Blessed Lady," said William gravely. "My father does, and no one could call *him* soft."

“ ’Course not,” said Tommy. “But some chaps would, all the same.”

“Silly idjuts!” answered William, and Tommy assented.

And so they went in great good fellowship to St. Stephen’s, and put up two candles, and said three Hail Marys. And this chapter, though short, is much more important than you might think, because it was really the beginning of the friendship between William and Tommy, a friendship which lasted all their lives. You have perhaps seen a picture called “The Birth of a Friendship,” in which two athletic young men are represented as shaking hands after running a race. My picture on that subject has two solemn-faced little boys in it, and shows them coming out of the porch of St. Stephen’s Church.

CHAPTER VII

A TEA PARTY

IT WILL be remembered that we left Alexander under somewhat painful circumstances; he was being escorted by the officer to a tram, having just said farewell to Miss Rose Gibbons. So anxious was he to escape the officer that he actually took the wrong tram without noticing the fact, and so squandered twopence quite unnecessarily. This, added to the various events of the afternoon, put him in a very bad temper by the time he reached home.

Now, when Alexander was in a bad temper he did not show it in any of the ordinary ways, but had a particular way of his own. He hardly ever flared up and became violent, and it was not often that you could positively swear that he was sulking. Instead he would deliver sudden and secret attacks upon all who were unfortunate enough to come across his path at the time, doing and saying sometimes most horribly spiteful things. Really the same allowances ought to have been made for him on these occasions as are generally made for people who lose their tempers and smash furni-

ture, but they never were, for the simple reason that he seemed to be doing it in cold blood. This was one of the reasons why he was, on the whole, a distinctly unpopular boy. If he had not been so well able to take care of himself he might have had a rather rough time of it at school. How he came to be so closely associated with Tommy and William I confess I can not explain. If you have ever done any chemistry you will know that the laws which govern the association of atoms are for the most part a hidden mystery, and the same certainly holds good of associations of school boys.

It certainly was not because either of the two were blind to his faults; on the contrary, they were extremely alive to them, and on their way from St. Stephen's Church to Alexander's home in Roscommon Street that afternoon they discussed them with great frankness. They had decided to lay the new plan of campaign before him at once, not as a suggestion awaiting his approval and confirmation, but as a thing he had to take on whether he liked it or not. It is true that at ordinary times Alexander was, in a sense, the leader, owing to the superior nimbleness of his wits, but his leadership was never an altogether undisputed one, especially on the part of William, who made

up in vigor of character and pertinacity what he lacked in quickness. Ever since the failure of the scheme for putting things right by greasing a second blackboard, the Brotherhood had been in a state of seething revolt, and they were now firmly determined to force this new plan down his throat at all costs. William, in particular, was very glad at having a plan to force down. On the way they discussed how it was to be done. "Shall we tell him about the praying part?" asked Tommy.

"'Course we shall," answered William; "it's one of the most important parts, and he certainly will have to do it as well as pony up. You just leave it to me."

Tommy felt vaguely that there was a difficulty hanging about somewhere, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. "When can you get the five shillings from your sister?" he asked, and William said he might be able to get it straight away if the girls had come back from school.

"It might be better if we did it to-night, 'stead of waiting," said Tommy. "If they're kept in to-morrow, Potter'll be madder'n ever, and if he catches Aleck he might make him own up and spoil it all. We'd have to own up, too, then, wouldn't we?"

"Dunno," said William doubtfully; "we might. But don't you worry, they'll never catch old Aleck, leastways I bet Potter doesn't. Aleck's about the slipperiest chap I ever met, and if they did and began to spank him or anything he'd probably pretend to have a fit and frighten 'em all to death, or somethin'."

"I dessay," answered Tommy, "but all the same, we ought to stop 'em being kept in again if we can. I felt miserable when Atty got sent down this morning, didn't you?"

"A bit," said William, "but it was kiddish to blub like that. I'd be glad enough to cut it short," he went on. "Mat says he's goin' to lick me every night till we do."

"I could come to night studies to-night—at least I think I could," said Tommy. The qualifying clause was due to the remembrance of Little Bo Peep of the night before, and the possibility of his services being required again.

"Me an' Aleck always go," said William, and at this moment they arrived at No. 7 Roscommon Street, the residence, it will be remembered, of Alexander, his aunt and his amiable sister. Faces (female, for the girls *had* returned) observed them from the May residence next door, but William, who had leave to stop out till tea time at six, was conscious of having

the law on his side, and surveyed them with indifference.

They rang the bell, and almost as they did so the door opened and Alexander's sister appeared—evidently about to go for a walk. I have said that she was an angel; she was also, I should add, a pupil teacher, and at that very same convent school attended by Susannah and the others. This being so, William and she were naturally well known to each other, and she nodded pleasantly when she saw him.

“'Afternoon, Willie,” she said, drawing on some very stylish tan-colored gloves. “Want to see Aleck?”

William raised his cap politely. (I may mention, perhaps, that Miss Comoran and the elder Misses May were in league to teach the younger male portion of each family to be polite to ladies. Defaulters were at once reported at headquarters.

“Yes, please, Miss Aggie,” he said. “This is Tommy Browne,” he added, by way of introduction. Miss Comoran held out her hand in a very friendly way, and Tommy looked shy, and also raised his cap, less gracefully, however, than William, because he had not been so well drilled.

“Come right in, both of you,” said Miss

Comoran hospitably. "Aunty's out for the day, but Aleck's just having tea, so you're just in time," and she led the way in and ushered them into a room at the back, where, sure enough, Aleck was having tea, and not looking very pleasant about it, either. He looked up as they entered, but said nothing more genial than "Hello!"

"Here are some friends of yours, Aleck," said his sister. "They're going to stop to tea. Run down, like a dear boy, and ask Sarah for one of this afternoon's loaves and a pot of jam, and you can pick which sort you like."

Aleck departed on the errand with an alacrity which may be explained by the fact that the table in its actual state was innocent of jam, while the loaf upon it was certainly not that afternoon's.

"Now, sit down, boys, and make yourselves at home," said Miss Comoran cheerfully, bustling about, putting new cups and plates on the table, and generally preparing things. They sat down, a little taken aback by this unexpected outburst of hospitality. You will remember that the primary object of their visit was to extort five shillings from Aleck and thrust their plan down his throat. William was particularly uncomfortable, being conscious

that his hands were not above reproach, and having had experience in the past of the efficient machinery of the League for Teaching the Young Politeness.

"Please, Miss Aggie, I think I'll just go and tell them I'm stopping to tea," he said at last, struck by a sudden happy thought, and keeping his hands carefully concealed underneath his cap. "Mother'll be expecting me."

"Oh, that will be all right, Willie," answered his hostess. "I'm just going out, and I'll call in and tell them as I pass. Will you sit here and you sit there—I've forgotten your names now, isn't that silly of me? Let me see, what was it? Timothy Tubbins?" Miss Aggie prided herself on her skill in putting the young at their ease.

"Tommy Browne, miss," said Tommy in an agony of shyness. He would probably have been put at his ease some more but for the opportune arrival of Aleck with the loaf and a large pot of jam. "It's quite hot," he said; "it's only just come."

"Good!" said Miss Aggie. "You can all make yourselves ill, then, can't you? *You* don't mind, do you, Willie?" William grinned appreciatively and said he didn't. New bread was an unknown luxury in the May household,

on account of the well-known rapidity with which it disappeared.

"Well, I must be off now, I'm afraid," said Miss Comoran. "Aleck, you must do the honors. Good-by, all of you."

William rose and held the door open and was rewarded with an approving smile. The league, you see, had not labored altogether in vain. "I won't forget to look in and tell them you're here," she said as she disappeared.

A sigh of relief went up from the guests as the front door was heard to close, and company manners disappeared as if by magic. It is a sad fact that sometimes even the society of angels is found to be a bar to conversation.

"How did you get on?" asked William, helping himself liberally to jam.

"Oh, I dodged 'em," said Aleck airily. "Potter's an awful ass, really. Shall we toss up for the crust? It was jolly lucky your meeting my sister like that; she's boss to-day, you see, and wanted to make a hit."

"*You* keep the crust," said William diplomatically. "I wish she was boss always."

"Good you remembered to open the door," said Aleck; "she'd have told your mother about it if you hadn't. Have some more tea, Tommy?"

Tommy had some more tea.

"Have you found out why there wasn't any row about the Upper Sixth blackboard?" asked William.

"They just don't want it to get known," said Aleck; "they've turned it round and so it hasn't been found out yet. You'll see it'll be all right, as I said, when they do."

This wasn't at all the line of action desired by the rebels, and William gave a dissatisfied grunt. "Tommy and me don't think it will," he said.

"Oh, don't you?" said Aleck; "you jus' wait and see."

"Not us," answered William, pushing away his plate with determination. "We've got another plan, haven't we, Tommy? That's what we've come about."

"We want to put some money on the master's desk to pay for it," said Tommy; "we can raise fifteen bob if you'll give five."

"What rot!" answered Aleck uncompromisingly. "You aren't even sure that the things are really spoiled at all. No one's tried taking it out with blotting paper yet."

"If they aren't they'll give it us back," said William doggedly; "we're not going to have the chaps kept in any longer, I can tell you

that. And we're not going to have any bills sent in, either. See?"

"We've tried *your* plan," said Tommy; "you might try ours."

"I don't see why I should," answered Aleck, who in his heart of hearts did not feel quite so confident of his own scheme as he wished it to appear, "especially as it's such a silly, foolin' plan."

"It's a good deal better than anything you've ever thought of," said William hotly. "And if you don't back us up, all I can say is you're about the lowest down sneak I've ever met."

"Won't you have some more jam, Billy?" said Aleck gently. He did not say it, I am afraid, with a view to softening the hardness of William's judgment, but because he thought it would annoy him. And it did.

"No, I won't," said William with great fierceness. "And don't you think you're askin' us to tea, 'cos you're not. It wasn't him, was it, Tommy?" Tommy diplomatically took a large mouthful of bread and jam and made no articulate reply.

"She'll be awfully pleased to hear how nicely you've been behaving, Billy," said Alexander in the same soft voice. (Please make as much allowance for him as you can; he was in a horrid

temper) ; "she'll tell your mother about it, and you'll be well spanked to-night."

"I won't," shouted William, goaded to fury and forgetfulness of the laws of hospitality by the insulting taunt.

"Oh, yes, you will, Billy," continued Alexander in the same irritating tone; "you didn't know he got spanked when he was a naughty boy, did you, Tommy? We can hear him squealin' through the wall sometimes. My aunt says it's a puffed nuisance."

"You liar!" yelled the unhappy William, the tears of mortification starting to his eyes at this (largely imaginary and very highly colored) revelation of domestic secrets, and trying to get at Alexander, who was careful to keep the table between them. "You just wait till I catch you, you ugly little beast."

"Shut up, Billy," said Tommy, interposing; "you can't fight him here, 'cos he asked us to tea."

"'Twasn't him," said William, gasping with rage. "I wouldn't have stopped if it was him. It was his sister."

"It's all the same," said Tommy.

"It's *awfully* bad form, you know, Billy," said Alexander softly; "that's why your mother'll be in such a rage."

"*You* can't talk," said Tommy candidly; "it's much worse to say things like that to a chap when you've asked him to tea." Alexander looked a little abashed for a moment.

"You'll get spanked yourself some day," said Tommy, feeling that he was master of the situation, "and then you won't think it so funny."

"No, he won't," said William bitterly. "His aunt's much too big a funk."

"You leave my aunt alone!" shouted Alexander.

"You shut up telling lies!" yelled William.

It was a mercy that no member of the League for Promoting Politeness in the Young was present.

"I'll fight you to-morrow, Aleck," said Tommy gravely, "for telling lies about Billy."

"I don't want to fight," said Aleck, suddenly backing down. "What is there to fight about? I ask you in to tea (with a glance at William), and Billy goes and gets in a tearin' rage and calls my aunt names. And I was just goin' to say I'd let you have the five shillings, though it's about all I've got, and though I think it's the silliest plan I ever heard of." Aleck's voice had taken the tone of virtuous protest in which it so excelled.

"Were you really, Aleck?" said Tommy, forgetting his indignation. "That's awfully decent of you."

"'Course I was," said Aleck. "I will now if Billy'll stop fooling, and if he's really got five bob himself. We'll put it on to-night after night studies."

"Bill's goin' to borrow it from his sister," said Tommy incautiously, whereat Aleck laughed in an aggressively offensive manner. "She'll lend it to him, will she?" he said. "I *don't* think."

"Yes, she will," said William, still simmering with indignation.

"Which one?" asked Aleck.

"Never you mind," said William hotly; "I'll get it, and that is enough for you."

"Well, go and get it now," said Aleck; "you can get over the garden wall and I'll go and get mine, and Tommy and I'll wait for you down there."

"Do go, Billy," said Tommy persuasively, "then we can settle everything straight off."

"I'll go, 'cos you ask me, Tommy," said William with dignity, "and I'll meet you down in the garden in ten minutes."

With that he departed. The houses in Roscommon Street, being built on precisely the

same plan, he had no difficulty in finding his way out.

"You were a cad to say that about Billy," said Tommy, when they were alone. "I don't wonder he got in a rage."

"Well, it's puffedly true," answered Aleck; "they all get spanked—at least all the kids do. I tell you, his mother's a holy terror; I'm jolly glad she's not mine. My aunt says she's got a masculine temperament."

"What's that mean?" asked Tommy.

"It means she's got a beastly bad temper," answered Aleck. "At least I think it does. Will you wait here a second while I go up and get my five bob?"

Tommy said he would, and a few minutes later Aleck returned and conducted him down into the back garden.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KNIGHT AND THE LADY

TOMMY and Aleck sat on the garden wall and waited. It was quite a low wall, not more than four feet high, I should think, and afforded a fine view of the back of William's home. Aleck enlivened the time of waiting, which considerably exceeded the contracted-for ten minutes, by pointing out the rooms occupied by the different members of the May family, with whose domestic concerns he seemed to have an intimate acquaintance. He took all the windows in order, beginning at the top, "where Mat and Billy sleep," down to the back kitchen. "I wonder which of the girls he's going to borrow it from," he said when he had finished; "I bet you anything you like it's Susy."

"Which is Susy?" asked Tommy, who had been throughout an interested listener.

"She's the next after Billy," said Aleck. "Not pretty, but a nice little thing. She and Billy always hang together."

"Do they?" said Tommy, and sighed, for in his sentimental moments he used to wish he had had a sister and to wonder what she would

have been like. He felt just then a little envious of Billy.

"There are nine of 'em altogether," continued Aleck. "One went off to be a nun last year, a jolly nice girl she was, too; one of the best of 'em. Jack's apprentice on the *Buluwayo*, the Captain's ship; he's the second oldest. Two of the girls go to the convent school; one's older than Mat and one's younger. They're all right, but not quite my sort; they're very thick with my sister and a bit stuck up. Then there's Billy, and then there's Susy, and then there're some kids. I *told* you it would be," he added, as the back door opened and William emerged, in company with a little girl in a brown holland pinafore, grasping tightly with the unoccupied hand what on closer inspection was seen to be a very capacious money box, the lid adorned with the legend: "A Present from Blackpool," and a slightly imaginative sketch in colors of that delightful watering place.

"She wants you to promise to pay it back," said William, a little shamefacedly, as seeming to confess to his own doubtful solvency. "But she'll let us have it, won't you, Susy?"

Aleck and Tommy were still sitting on the wall, and looked down judicially on the pair.

"Well, you *are* a little softy, Susy," said Aleck. "You don't think you'll ever see it back again, surely."

Susy looked up at him in genuine alarm. Not one of them even guessed the immensity of the sacrifice she was making for her beloved William.

"Willie said you'd *all* promise to pay it back," she said distressfully. "It's taken a drefful time to save up."

"Willie's talking through his hat," answered Aleck roughly. "It's bad enough to have to pay five bob yourself without promising to pay back other people's. *I'm* not going to, I tell you straight."

"I'll promise," said Tommy suddenly, and blushing a little. All his life he had been very shy with ladies. "I'll promise faithfully."

Susy looked at him gratefully, and gave William the money box at once. "Got the key?" he asked, shaking it.

She began to search in her pocket for it. "Give it to me," said Aleck, and William thoughtlessly handed the box over.

"You don't want a key for this sort of box," said Aleck, looking at it contemptuously. "You just pull it and it comes open."

"Oh, please, please don't," cried the little

girl in great distress. "It's my only money box, and it's got a bu'ful lock."

"Drop it, Aleck," roared Tommy in such a ferocious way that he took them all by surprise. "Drop it, d'you hear." Aleck obviously did hear, but instead of dropping it, he gave a wrench at the lid. A moment later he had disappeared from view altogether, having been precipitated backwards over the wall by a vigorous blow in the chest from Tommy, who at the same time descended from his seat (on the May side of the wall) and took up a defensive attitude.

A moment later Aleck reappeared on the other side decidedly pink in the face, and evidently meaning mischief. "What're you laughing at?" he said indignantly—to William, however, not to Tommy.

"*You*," answered William cheerfully; "you did look funny."

"You come over here, young Billy," answered Aleck, "and I'll give you something to laugh for."

"*You* come over here," retorted William; "Tommy's got something for you, haven't you, Tommy?"

"Oh, *please* make him give back my money box," cried Susannah, addressing Tommy,

whose dashing exploit had much impressed her (as indeed it was intended to). "It's my only money box, and I *know* he's going to break it open."

"Give it back," said Tommy.

"Come and fetch it," answered Aleck, backing away toward the house. Tommy vaulted over the wall and made a dash for him, but Aleck was too quick and disappeared through the back door. A minute later he appeared at one of the upper story windows making believe to force the box open with the end of a poker. At this awful sight Susannah broke down altogether, and hid her face in her apron and wept aloud.

The baffled Tommy returned, rather crest-fallen, to the wall and watched William's not very successful attempts to console the afflicted proprietor. From under the brown holland pinafore, amid the torrent of heart-rending sobs, the words "money box," "poker," "horrid boy," could at times be distinguished. Tommy was terribly distressed.

"I say, don't cry," he said at last; "*please* don't cry. I'll get it back for you all right, really I will; Aleck's only foolin'!"

No reply beyond a more than usually convulsive sob.

"I'll knock his ugly head off, really I will," said Tommy earnestly. "And I'll get you a new money box if he spoils it." But the sobs continued unabated.

"And I'll get my mother to paint a picture on the outside," continued Tommy, racking his little brains for motives of consolation. "And she paints most be-utifully, doesn't she, Billy?"

"Somethin' wonderful," answered William. "It'll be worth hundreds of pounds," he added, "at the very least."

But alas! a present from Blackpool in the hand is worth more than even a masterpiece of Mrs. Clementina's in the bush, and the tears still flowed unabated.

"Shall I tickle her under the arms?" said William, to whom the sight of distressed damsels was a not unfamiliar one. "It makes 'em stop very often." Tommy, however, was so obviously shocked at the suggestion that he did not pursue it. They both stood by and looked helplessly on. "A present—from a—friend," came in piteous tones from under the brown holland pinafore.

"Is there any one in there besides Aleck?" asked Tommy, struck by a sudden idea.

"Two servants," answered William. "The cook's a beast," he added emphatically.

"Will you come if I do?" asked Tommy.

"Come where?" said William.

"Into the house and make him give it up," said Tommy. "We can say his sister asked us to tea."

William looked rather alarmed at the proposal, which contained elements of danger unknown to Tommy. But after a moment's consideration he consented. "We'll have to keep our eyes open for his aunt," he said by way of warning.

"Look here, Susy, you stop crying, like a good girl, and we'll go after Aleck and punch his head, and get it back," he added, putting his arm round her neck and pulling away the brown pinafore screen. The sobs sensibly diminished at his words, but it was a very woe-begone and tear-stained little face that appeared, all the same.

"He won't hurt it," said Tommy. "He knows Billy and me'd pay him back if he did." Susannah smiled faintly through her tears at this valorous utterance.

"You stop here and wait," said William. "We'll be back directly and give it you. He deposited her carefully on the top of the wall, from which point of vantage she watched them

depart on their perilous errand, mopping her eyes at intervals.

They approached the back door and opened it. Within all seemed quiet, and they entered with all the sensations of midnight marauders. The kitchen was underground, and not a sign was to be seen of the retainers of the family. In the hall they paused and listened. "That's his aunt's umbrella," said William in an awe-struck whisper, "and Aggie's galoshes. We'll be in a hole if she comes back and catches us."

"I thought you said she couldn't say boo to a goose," whispered Tommy. "Why are you so scared about it?"

"My mother's always telling her she's too slack with Aleck," whispered his companion, "and that she ought to keep him in order better and she doesn't like it, and keeps on the lookout for any of us, and goes and tells if she sees us doing anything. She caught Mat smoking once. My gummy, there was a row!" Tommy nodded. "Shall we go upstairs?" he whispered, his whole soul being bent on the recovery of the money box. "Which room was it he looked at us through the window?"

"The bathroom," answered William. "Aleck's bedroom's on the floor above. I say, Tommy, pr'aps we'd better not."

If, dear sir or madam, you have ever tried the experiment of what it feels like to walk about uninvited in somebody else's empty house you will understand William's hesitation. There is a sort of sense of desecration, a "trespassers will be prosecuted" sort of feeling, an impression that some one is going to rush out from behind a door and seize you, which explains, I fancy, why burglary is not more popular than it is. Both boys were a little daunted, to tell the truth, and paused at the foot of the stairs to listen. As they did so a burst of melody arose from the kitchen in the basement down below.

"I wo'den leave—my little wooden 'ut—for you—oo; 'wo'den leave—my little wooden 'ut—for you—oo" a shrill female voice was heard to declare, and a firm step was heard ascending the kitchen stair, the melody growing each moment in intensity. At the sound William gave one wild glance at the front door and then bolted upstairs and into the bathroom at the top, Tommy following him. "That's the *cook*," said William, when they were safely under cover. "I pea-shooted her once, and she's been looking for me ever since." He had bolted the door, and was listening with his ear to the keyhole. "Oh, crumbs!

she's coming," he whispered. And she was.

She came to the door and tried the handle. She tried it first with one hand and then with the other, and then with both. She shook it and leaned against it so that it creaked ominously. Then she called in a low voice, "Is that you, Miss Aggie? Is that you, Master Aleck?" Then she shook it again more violently. The two trespassers stood holding their breath and with their hearts in their boots. "Who's in there?" she called at last. "Who is it?" It is scarcely necessary to state that she called in vain.

"I'll tell your *Ha'nt*, Master Aleck," came as a last despairing effort.

Then there was a pause. "Can't we get out of the window?" whispered Tommy; but William shook his head hopelessly. "Clear drop," he said.

Again the handle was violently agitated, and the whole door creaked under violent pressure from outside. Then the footsteps seemed to go away, and for a moment hope sprung up in the hearts of the captives. It was only for a moment, however, for their adversary had only gone to the well of the staircase and was calling loudly for Alexander. "Master Ale-eck,

Master Aleck!" they could hear her shouting, and immediately afterward Alexander's voice, asking in its gentlest tones what the matter was.

"There's some one in the bathroom, Master Aleck," said the cook in awestruck tones. "As I was coming up the kitchen stairs I heard an 'eavy tread above me 'ead, and when I come up the door was fast and bolted. What's become of them boys you had to tea, Master Aleck?"

"Oh, they went home a good while ago," Aleck was heard to answer. "Billy May was one of them," he traitorously added.

"*The old sneak!*" muttered William indignantly under his breath.

"Ho! was it?" exclaimed the cook. "Then I'll be bound it's 'im, Master Aleck. He's come back to see what mischief he can be after, that's what he's done. A more impudent little rascal I never set eyes on."

"He *is* rather cheeky, isn't he, cook?" answered Aleck virtuously.

"Impudent isn't the word," said the cook, whose indignation was evidently rising. "I'll take him straight in to his mar, *that's* what I'll do. You'd best come out at wunst," she added, shaking the door handle vigorously.

"Don't you think you'd better get a policeman, cook?" Aleck suggested gently, with a sudden remembrance of Miss Rose Gibbons. The words froze the blood of the unhappy captives.

"If he don't come out at wunst," answered the cook, "I will so. Are you coming?" she demanded, with another shake at the door.

"Shall we?" whispered Tommy, but William shook his head.

"I'm going for a policeman," she said through the keyhole. "And you'll be took to the lock-up and give a good 'iding—and not before you want it," she concluded indignantly. But there was no response from within.

"Very well," said the cook solemnly, "so be it! Don't you blame *me* if you spend this night in a prison cell. You just lock the door, Master Aleck, and keep an eye on it, and I'll step out and ask Constable Robbins to step in."

"Please be quick, cook," said Aleck. "They may force the lock and half murder me while you're gone."

"I won't be five minutes," answered the cook. "I won't even wait to put on me 'at." A clearly felt vibration revealed to the prisoners the fact that she was tripping lightly down-

stairs, and a moment later the noise of the front door opening told them she had gone. Instantly William shot back the bolt and tugged at the handle, but the fatal fact that the key had been left on the outside placed them absolutely in Alexander's power.

"Oh, Aleck, let's out, there's a *decent* chap," shouted William, almost beside himself with terror. "Don't let the bobby come and arrest us."

"Aren't you sorry you were so rude at tea, Billy?" came softly from the other side.

"Yes, I am," shrieked William.

"Awfully sorry?" asked Aleck.

"Awfully sorry," shouted the prisoner.

"Aren't you sorry you pushed me over the wall, Tommy?"

"Yes," answered Tommy, "beastly sorry."

"Wasn't it a caddish thing to do, Tommy?"

"Awfully caddish," shouted Tommy.

It was, we must admit, an unqualified surrender, but, dear sir or madam, would you, under similar circumstances, have acted otherwise?

Then Alexander unlocked the door, retreating as he did so to the ascending flight of stairs in case of an attack. But his prisoners were far from entertaining any such designs. The

open door revealed two white-faced little boys, half scared out of their lives, and whose one and only thought was to seek safety in flight. Even Aleck for once was moved to pity, his good nature getting the better of his love of tormenting. "I won't let her go in and tell about you, Billy," he said; "she doesn't know for certain it's you, and I won't tell her." William gave him a grateful look and was gone. Tommy was just about to follow him when a sudden remembrance of Susannah, tear-stained and expectant on the garden wall, rose up before him.

"Let's have the money-box," he said, stopping short.

"It's upstairs," answered Aleck, not unkindly; "you'd better scoot, Tommy; "she'll be back directly."

"I want the money-box," repeated Tommy doggedly, though with a fearful eye on the front door, and Aleck ran upstairs to get it. The minute he had gone seemed an eternity, and if there were such a thing as a Victoria Cross for Third Form boys—and I don't see why there shouldn't be—Tommy certainly deserved to get it. At the end of a minute Alexander returned with the coveted object, and then indeed Tommy scooted, the jingle of the

coins in the money-box accompanying his flight.

And when very shortly after the cook returned in company with Constable Robbins, she found, curious to relate, that Alexander had scooted likewise. I think we may forgive Constable Robbins if he infringed the police regulations to the extent of partaking of a glass of ale before returning to his beat.

CHAPTER IX

SUSANNAH

TOMMY found Susannah still sitting alone on the garden wall, but no signs of William. He held up the money-box triumphantly as he approached. "Oh, I am so glad," she exclaimed gratefully. "I was so 'fraid you hadn't," and she clasped it eagerly, as he held it out to her. "It was a present from a *friend*, you see," she added, by way of explanation.

"He hasn't hurt it," said Tommy. "Didn't I tell you he was only foolin'?"

"He's a *horrid* boy, that Aleck," said Susannah severely; "my mother says he wants a good thrashing. I don't like him a bit. Weren't you afraid of being caught?"

"Oh, no," said Tommy airily. "I wanted to get it for you, you see," he added with a slight blush. "I wanted you to stop crying."

"I'm im-*mensely* obliged," said Susannah, who made a special study of elder sisters' polite conversational phrases. "I think it was *most* kind."

"I'd do it again any time," said Tommy eagerly; "really I would."

"Thank you *very* much," answered Susannah simply. There was a slight pause in the conversation.

"Did Billy go in?" asked Tommy at last.

Susannah nodded. "He said he was in a great hurry, and he told me to show you the way out by the back," she said. "Perhaps I'd better now."

"*I'm* not in a hurry," said Tommy. "I think it's very jolly here. Don't you?" This was only partially true, I should explain, as he was all the while painfully conscious of the possibility of a rear attack on the part of the cook and Constable Robbins.

Susannah looked doubtful. "I'm afraid I mustn't stop," she said. "'Cos we haven't been introjooiced. My sister says you must *never* talk to people when you haven't been introjooiced."

"Oh, but we *have*," answered Tommy. "Billy introjooiced us."

"Did he?" said Susannah. "I don't remember."

"My name's Tommy Browne," said Tommy.

"Mine's Susannah Mary May," said his companion.

"It's a very nice name," said Tommy. "I like it."

"I'm glad you like it," said Susannah. "Most people don't. There's a girl in our class says it's the silliest name she's ever heard."

"Stoopid thing!" replied Tommy, with exaggerated scorn. Susannah was obviously gratified.

"If I had a sister," said Tommy stoutly, "I should like her to be called Susannah."

"Would you *really*?" said his companion, who obviously regarded this guileless piece of flattery as the statement of a well-reasoned opinion. "Haven't you got *any* sister?"

"No," said Tommy, "nor any brothers, either." Again there was a pause.

"Please, I *must* go," said Susannah at length. "Mother wouldn't like it."

"All right," said Tommy, getting down from the wall. "I wouldn't get you in a row for anything. But you'll show me the way out, won't you?" He held out his hand, and she took it trustfully. "It's quite easy," she said. "It's that door over there, but perhaps I'd better show you how it opens."

So they went hand in hand down the garden path, Tommy racking his brains for something nice to say, but not finding it. "Shall I give you the money?" said Susannah, breaking the silence.

"Give it to Billy," said Tommy, "but I'll see that you get it back all right."

"Thank you very much," said Susannah. "I want it back dreadfully badly, really I do."

"When do you want it by?" asked Tommy.

"I want it by the beginning of the holidays," she answered. "Billy said it was to keep him out of getting into trouble, and I don't want Willie to get into trouble, though he doesn't mind getting into it. Do you mind?"

"Not a straw," said Tommy jauntily.

"Nor does Willie," she answered with obvious pride; "he doesn't turn a hair."

"I don't, either," said Tommy.

"But I do want it back most *dreadfully*," she said with a wistful look at her companion. "I know Willie'll try to pay it back, but he only gets fourpence a week. What do you get?"

"I get sixpence," said Tommy with a blush, and wishing that his income were larger; "but I'll get it for you somehow, I promise I will."

"I'm *really* grateful," said Susannah with sincerity, and at this point they reached the door.

"It opens like this," she said, and proceeded to manipulate the latch. "Now I must really say good-by."

“Good-by,” said Tommy, blushing; “I say, won’t you call me ‘Tommy’?”

“I don’t think my sister would,” said Susannah shyly; “she’d say it wasn’t lady-like.”

“Oh, no, she wouldn’t,” said unscrupulous Tommy. “She’d call me ‘Tommy’ right off. I *know* she would.”

“Good-by, Tommy,” said Susannah, reassured, and holding out her hand. “I’m—very—glad—to have—made your—acquaintance,” she added with careful correctness, as one repeating a sacred formula.

“S’m I,” answered Tommy, taking the little hand and holding it for a minute. “I’ll—I’ll never forget you, really I won’t.” Then he turned away suddenly and walked off very fast, and only remembered at the corner that he ought to have raised his cap. It was too late then, for the door was closed and Susannah had disappeared. But all the way home he thought of Susannah, and wondered why it was that some boys have all the luck, and are blessed with little sisters to be kind to them. But the curious thing, it seems to me, is that the boys who have this luck so often don’t seem to know they’ve got it.

The events we have been narrating in the last

two chapters had occupied so much time that Tommy found there was only just enough left for him to get home and back to school again for night studies. Ordinarily, as we have seen, he prepared his lessons at home, but he sometimes went back to school when Mrs. Clementina was out for the evening, or when there was some special work to be done, so he did not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission. However, when he reached Laburnam Villa (did I mention that that was the name of Mrs. Clementina's residence?) he found that his mother had been out to tea and had not yet returned. This information was imparted to him by Mrs. Golightly, officially described as a "cook—housekeeper," but in reality a great many other things as well. In fact, Mrs. Golightly ran Laburnam Villa single-handed, but as we shall not see very much of her, I need not dwell at any great length upon her character and tastes, beyond saying that she was of a somewhat melancholy temperament. Her relations with Tommy were largely colored by the subject of boots, Mrs. Golightly holding that boys in Tommy's position ought to black their own boots, and Tommy favoring the opposite opinion. A trivial matter, you will say, yet one, I assure

you, which admits of quite exciting complications. I could write a whole story on Mrs. Golightly and Tommy's boots.

His mother's absence was a distinctly awkward circumstance, for it involved the necessity of taking French leave, always a more or less doubtful proceeding. However, he told Mrs. Golightly boldly that he was going back to school, and asked her to let his mother know. He should have let it stop there and gone, but instead of that he weakly added, "I don't suppose she'll be wanting me, will she?" Mrs. Golightly was one of those people who, if you let them think you want one answer, always try to give the other, and said immediately that she was pretty sure Mrs. Clementina would be wanting him. "Well, I'm going anyhow," said Tommy, and bounced indignantly out of the room.

He went upstairs to get his contribution to the blackboard fund, and found to his annoyance that the treasury contained only four and ninepence. Then he went into the study and saw the hated Bo Peep costume lying ready for use on the model platform, and had to stifle his conscience. He banged the front door so hard that Mrs. Golightly in the kitchen gave a start and pricked her finger, and sighed

deeply. She was darning a tablecloth at the time.

The farther he went the more uneasy his conscience grew. He knew that his mother had sometimes to get her drawings sent off by a particular post, and perhaps she wanted to finish the Bo Peep things that evening. Again, he knew quite well she liked to have him there to talk to; she always said she could work better with somebody in the room. But, on the other hand, if he didn't go he was pretty sure that Aleck would seize the excuse for backing out, and in that case even if William persevered alone, which was not very likely, Susannah's five shillings would hardly be accepted as an adequate act of restitution. As he was turning over these perplexing thoughts he saw, at the other end of the street he was just entering, his mother approaching. There was no difficulty in seeing Mrs. Clementina, for she was very large (I don't know whether I mentioned the fact before), and was dressed at the present moment in a lavender-colored dress, with some sort of black puffs stuck about on it. This, however, is not a scientific description of the dress, and if you think it sounds curious, I may tell you that people who understand such things admired it very much. When she saw

Tommy (you will remember that she had good eyesight) she began to wave her parasol by way of greeting. Tommy stopped, for one moment he hesitated, and then bolted down a side street as hard as he could run. I am glad to be able to say that he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself by the time he got to the corner. All the same, he did not go back.

Why did he do it, I wonder? Because you must admit that it was a very unkind, undutiful, unbecoming, altogether reprehensible thing to do, and Tommy was not a bad boy, by any means; rather the reverse, if anything. He did it on the spur of the moment, feeling, somehow, that escape would be hopeless if once that magnificent figure in lavender and black got hold of him, and feeling just then that he must escape. But though he did not go back, he felt exceedingly unhappy all the rest of the way to school, and made up his mind that if he could catch William and Alexander before the beginning of night studies he would try to get them to take the money and manage the business without him, and go straight home and say he was sorry. For in the bottom of his heart he knew that he must have hurt his mother's feelings, and he was very fond of her and very sorry.

As luck would have it, he met his two accomplices just outside the college gates. They were holding a heated altercation, and William especially was scarlet in the face with suppressed indignation. Before he could make his suggestion, in fact before he could say anything at all, William had turned to him and explained his grievance. "Aleck says he won't let us have his five bob unless we all three stop and put it on the desk," he burst out. "He's doing it because he wants to get me in a row. He knows I'll catch it if I get in after Mat, that's what he's doing it for."

"I'm not," answered Aleck, with virtuous calm. "It isn't my plan. I think it's a silly, foolish plan, and I'm only doin' it because you and Tommy want to. I don't see why I should take all the risk as well."

"Nobody wants you to take all the risk," shouted William. "Tommy'll stop, won't you, Tommy?"

"Billy'll stop, too," said Aleck in his most irritating voice, "or it's off so far as I'm concerned." They both looked to Tommy for confirmation.

"I suppose we'll all have to stop," said Tommy mournfully, seeing his hope of getting home vanish like smoke. "It'll only take a

second, Billy, and you can sprint home after."

"Oh, I dessay," answered William sarcastically. "That *sounds* all right enough, but in things like this you never know what's going to turn up."

And indeed you never do. Certainly, if the Black Brothers had known, they would have stopped and reflected once and again and yet again before they embarked upon this well-meant but misguided attempt to effect restitution and put things straight. For we have come now, I regret to say, to a period of un-mixed and unmitigated calamity. The thunder-clouds are gathering, the gloom is deepening, the tragedy, in short, is about to commence. When in real tragedy the point is reached, and the virtuous merchant, or whoever it is, is about to be murdered by the unmitigated villain, they turn down the footlights and make the orchestra play a slow and creepy sort of music. These resources are denied the story-teller, but it is a fact that as they entered the college portals a street singer in a neighboring street could be heard wailing out an exceedingly mournful ditty. "Soon—shall—you—an'—I—be ly-hi-hin"—the words could he heard distinctly—"heach—within—is—narrow—bed."

It may have been this melody, or their own private anxieties, which made each of the Black Brothers feel a sudden sinking of the heart as they entered with the heedless crowd.

CHAPTER X

NIGHT STUDIES

TEN minutes were allowed after the doors were opened for the collection of books and other necessary articles, and at the end of the time all had to be in the study place. The Black Brothers made use of the interval for arranging a rapid plan of campaign. It was settled on the suggestion of Aleck, who, in spite of his opposition to the plan, at once began to take the lead, that they should stay behind in the big study hall at the end of the night studies, hide there till every one had cleared off, then slip out and up to their own class room, put the money on the desk, and slip down to the big door and so home. The big door was closed a quarter of an hour after the end of night studies, but most of the boys had cleared off long before then. There was absolutely no danger of being locked in, as the porter would always let you out by the side door, being a remarkably accommodating and good-tempered porter. The only things that remained to be done were the writing of the explanatory letter, and the discovery of some

sort of receptacle for the money. As Susannah's contribution was largely in copper and threepenny bits, and Tommy's likewise, except for a solitary two-shilling piece, the combined sum weighed more than a trifle and occupied considerable space. It was decided to borrow a cap from the master's room and pour the whole into the crown of it.

The letter of explanation gave more trouble. Each of the three conspirators wrote one during the first half hour of night studies and passed it on for approval to the others, and got it back with unfavorable comments appended. William's was the simplest. "This is to pay for the blackboard. Please let the boys out," it ran, and it came back with "No" (Aleck) and "too short" (Tommy) scribbled on by way of criticism. Tommy's was more apologetic. It read as follows: "This money (14/9) is to pay for greasing the blackboard, for which we are very sorry for spoiling, and won't do it again. Some more will be put if wanted. Please don't keep the boys in any more." It came back with "Kiddish" from Aleck and "Gives the show away" from William. Aleck made a not altogether successful attempt at dignity. "The sum here present," it stated, "is to pay for the damage

(if any) done to alleged blackboard. In anticipation that you won't keep the class in any more, not being guilty. Signed, The Perpetrators." It came back with, "Beastly raw" (William) and "Yes, it is" (Tommy).

As it was impossible to discuss the matter at length (there was a fairly watchful master hovering about on the horizon, for one thing), each of the three printed his own in capital letters on a sheet of ordinary exercise book paper, so as to have it ready at the end, in case it was wanted. They were still toiling at this task, all three of them, when an interruption occurred. All the boys in the hall, instead of bending over their respective tasks as they had been a moment before, were now suddenly found to be sitting bolt upright and listening to a voice in the gallery outside. Even the presiding master ceased to hover and stood still and listened. It was still a good way off, and yet no one had the smallest difficulty in recognizing whose it was, as there was only one voice like it, at any rate in that school, and it possessed the curious property of penetrating everywhere, making all who heard it think of their shortcomings and deficiencies. It was the voice of Dr. Whales, head master of the school. A look of rapt attention was on every

face, and hearing powers were obviously being strained to the uttermost as the voice ceased to be a mere distant rumble of thunder and became articulate. "Who was in there last? Who was in there last? It's perfectly monstrous! I'll put a stop to it! I'll certainly put a stop to it!" These and other like expressions were being shot off with the speed and vigor of bullets from a Maxim gun or an automatic repeating pistol as Dr. Whales came rapidly down the gallery, pouring in a raking broadside as he went, presumably upon his companion or companions, whose presence was otherwise undiscoverable.

The door of the study hall flew open with terrific violence and disclosed the expected apparition. Dr. Whales was evidently in a state of considerable indignation. His mortar-board was stuck at the back of his head, and his very gown seemed to vibrate in harmony with his mood. "I want to speak to the boys for a minute, Mr. Noldin," he projected rather than spoke, as he entered the room. Mr. Noldin (the master who had been hovering) at once resigned his command, and Dr. Whales strode up to the desk at the end and mounted it. Through the open door could be seen a most miscellaneous group of spectators, evi-

dently a portion of the escorting crowd. Besides a number of boys, looking extremely scared, there was Mr. Bowling, one of the chemistry masters, Henry, the porter, and Mrs. Curtiss, one of the women who swept the class rooms. Dr. Whales' indignation always exercised a sort of magnetic attraction.

All the boys had stood up as the head master entered, but as he mounted to the desk he made so vigorous a gesture that they sat down with a suddenness and rapidity which suggested a regiment of toy soldiers being bowled over. "Now," said Dr. Whales—"now, boys, I've something to say to you." There is no word in the language sufficiently strong to express the intense and expectant silence which followed this announcement.

"I was taking out a class this evening," continued Dr. Whales, dividing his discourse, as usual into incisive phrases, "for mathematics. I had to use the blackboard, the Upper Sixth blackboard. When I attempted to use that blackboard I found that some mischievous boy or other had been at it. It was coated all over with candle grease."

Every one was staring hard at Dr. Whales, which explains why the obvious embarrassment

of two at least of the Black Brothers passed unnoticed.

“This is the second time within two days,” continued the doctor, “that this silly and disgusting trick has been played. Whether the offenders are the same in both cases I can’t at present say. I should hope there are not many boys in the school capable of such a gutter-snipe antic. It’s worse than mischievous and dirty, it’s positively wicked. Wantonly to destroy other people’s property is much the same as stealing. It *is* stealing, though probably the silly boys responsible hardly realize that.”

“I am told,” he went on, “that a whole class has been punished for two days running on account of the first of these two cases. I don’t care to say what I think of a boy who lets his companions suffer because he hasn’t pluck enough to own up and take his just punishment. It is difficult to imagine anything meaner. I don’t know whether the offenders are here to-night, but if they are, let me tell them that, for their own sakes, they’d better own up before they go home. They won’t escape the punishment they have so richly deserved, but, on the whole, it will be better for them. Sooner or later they will certainly be brought to justice. I shall place the matter, as

one affecting the reputation of the school, in the hands of the monitors and the Upper Sixth. I may tell them a distinct clue has been discovered. Now you may go on with your work." With one final glare (I should have said that the penetrating glances he shot in all directions was always one of the most impressive features of Dr. Whales' orations), he left the desk and stalked out of the room, picking up as he departed the class whose mathematical studies had been so unfortunately disturbed.

One result of his harangue had been that three pieces of exercise paper bearing a careful inscription in capital letters disappeared in the shape of three crumpled balls into three pockets. They would have been torn up into small fragments but for the fear of attracting attention. Dr. Whales' departure left the breasts of those three ingenious authors a prey to the direst consternation, a consternation so overwhelming that they did not even venture to look at each other, much less at any one else, during the rest of the time devoted to night studies. They remained with faces glued to their books, absorbed, to all appearances, in the task before them, yet for all this apparent earnestness, making very little progress. For

the situation, which before had been difficult and dangerous, yet not without hope of a peaceful solution, had somehow suddenly become one of simply appalling horror and blackness, admitting, apparently, of no hope whatever. The path, which an hour before had promised to lead out of the wood, had suddenly plunged them into a ravine full of dangerous dragons and pitfalls of every description. This is my way of looking at it, not theirs. *They* were principally occupied in wondering what the others would want to do, vividly conscious, all three of them, of a peculiar cold feeling in the region of the stomach, which seemed to extend to other members with a sort of icy shoot as one or other of Dr. Whales' menacing remarks recurred to their minds.

The time slipped by with wonderful rapidity. The end came, night prayers were said, and the boys packed up their books and departed. But the three Black Brothers sat on, ostensibly packing up their books like the rest, but really waiting for the coast to be cleared enough for them to speak to one another on the all-important subject of their course of action. With a parting, "Come, be quick, be quick," Mr. Noldin departed like the rest, and a moment later all the lights went out. The

boy entrusted with this office (the tap was in the corridor outside) evidently thought that the room was clear.

The darkness brought with it at first a distinct sense of relief, for they had all three been suffering from a feeling that every one must be looking at them. "They think we've gone," whispered Aleck; "we can talk now, all right."

"Let's get under cover, case they turn it up," whispered William. It was a very subdued and awe-struck whisper indeed. They got up and groped their way carefully to a sort of alcove which extended along the room behind the master's desk. A dim and ghostly light streamed through the six long windows. "S'pose they lock the door," whispered Tommy.

"They never do," answered Aleck. "I've been back lots of times to get books after the lights were out. It hasn't even got a key." They proceeded accordingly to take cover.

"Well?" said William.

"Well?" answered Aleck. There was a pause. Something in the room creaked loudly and made them all jump.

"We'd better own up, like he said," said Tommy suddenly, in a very curious sort of voice. "P'r'aps if we offer 'im the money he

won't send in any bills. We'd b-better get it over."

"Tommy's blubbing," said William.

"Tommy's a silly, kiddish little fool," said Aleck in a tone of great irritation. "Even s'posing we have to own up, what's the good of going when he's in a tearing rage like to-night?"

"He said we were *thieves*," said Tommy, whose distressful condition was no longer open to question. "We d-didn't mean to be th-thieves."

They had grown accustomed to the gloom by this time, and they could see him sorrowfully mopping his eyes.

"Don't cry, Tommy," said William kindly. "We aren't thieves really, and if we are, we'll pay it back." He put his arm round Tommy's shoulder, but Tommy refused to be comforted, and went on sobbing for all he was worth.

"It's no good stoppin' here and watching Tommy blubbing like a silly, blitherin' preparatory kid," said Alexander at last. "S'pose we go on with the plan, just the same. Even if they do find out, it won't do any harm. D'you think Matt'll split now, Billy?"

"No," said Billy, "'cos he doesn't know for absolutely certain, for one thing. But he'll

make things pretty hot for me, I can tell you that!"

"Well, then, I don't see really that we're any worse off than before," said Aleck, who did not seem to see much in this last argument, "unless he's really got a clue—oh, do shut up blubbing, Tommy, and behave sensibly; what on earth is the good of carrying on like a little kid? Did anybody spot you in the Upper Sixth class room?"

"I c-can't help it," sobbed Tommy. "N-nobody saw me."

"He said we didn't know it was like stealing, Tommy," said William soothingly. "And he was in a most tearing rage."

"'Course he was," said Alexander; "it's a most ridic'lus idea, as anybody but a little soft like Tommy'd see. We'll just go and stick it on the Coon's desk like we meant to, and you'll see it'll be all right. Not that it isn't a silly plan, all the same," he added, with an eye to consistency.

"*You* can't talk!" retorted William. "Whose plan was it to grease the Upper Sixth black-board?"

"If we stand here jawing much longer," said Aleck in a tone of remonstrance, "the big door'll be locked, and we shall have to go to

Henry to get out, and that really will be a clue. So if we're going to, we'd better scoot, only don't make more row than you can help."

So they quitted their shelter and groped their way on tiptoe to the door at the other end of the room. William was the first to get there, and after fumbling about a little he found the handle and tried to open it. He turned it first one way and then the other, he pushed and pulled and shook it, quietly at first, but then without any regard to secrecy. The door obstinately refused to open.

"What're you making such a fuss about?" said Aleck angrily (it was a secret fear inside him that made him angry); "it opens quite easily."

"Does it?" said William, giving up the handle; "you try."

Alexander seized it first in one hand, then with both, and performed the same evolutions as William, with even more vigorous disregard of secrecy, but with the same want of success. "It's got stuck somehow," he said at last, leaning against it and giving it a more than ever vigorous shake.

"Let Tommy try," said William, with a faint hope that there might be an element of luck in the matter. Things do unlock for some people

when they won't for others in a most curious way. Tommy tried, but the door still held fast.

"It's got jammed somehow," said Aleck in a voice that tried hard to be like its ordinary self, but did not quite succeed. "S'pose we all push against it together."

"It's not jammed, you silly idjut," said William miserably, giving expression at last to the fears of all three. "It's well locked, and it's no good pretending it isn't."

"It *can't* be," said Aleck, trying to speak with a confidence he was far from feeling; "I tell you it's never locked. There isn't even a key."

"Well, they've raised one somehow, 'cos any one but a born fool can see it is," said William. "I s'pose we'll have to shout now and make Henry hear."

"Wait and see," said Aleck. "Got a match?" Neither of them had. The darkness, which had been at first rather welcome, now began to be intolerable.

"Well, I must do it without, then," said Aleck, and they could hear him fumbling and scratching in a mysterious way at the door.

"What on earth're you fooling at?" asked William irritably. "If we wait much longer

Henry'll be gone, and we'll be higeously late as it is."

"I'm picking the lock," answered Aleck; "it's what burglars do, and it's quite easy." For one brief moment a gleam of hope lighted up in the hearts of the other two. Like so many of Alexander's plans, it looked at first sight plausible and brilliant. For at least five minutes they stood patiently by listening to the mysterious scratching noise, while Alexander broke the point off three blades of his pocket knife in succession, in his vain efforts to move the obstinate tongue of iron which barred their way to freedom.

"Can't you manage it?" asked Tommy anxiously at last.

"I can't make the beastly thing hold," answered Aleck, with an anxious quaver in his voice.

"Look here, Aleck," said William desperately, "I'm not going to stick any more of it. I'm going to shout for Henry."

"All right, shout away," answered Aleck, and he had scarcely spoken before he gave a shout himself, or perhaps it would be more accurately described as a squeal. The mutilated pocket knife had revenged itself by closing with a snap on the fleshy part of his hand just

under the thumb. It would have been a nasty cut at any time, but coming in the dark, and on top of all his other misfortunes, it quite broke down what remained of Alexander's fortitude. No despised infant of the preparatory class could have wept more whole-heartedly or with less thought of concealment.

The other two were, on the whole, sympathetic—considering the danger of their situation, extraordinarily so. They lent him their handkerchiefs to bandage up the wounded member, Alexander moaning the while and saying it was the place that gave you lock-jaw, and he was sure to get it. At least another precious five minutes was spent on this charitable task before William recalled them to the actualities of the situation and the necessity of shouting for Henry if they weren't going to miss him altogether. He went to the door at once and shouted through the keyhole, but though he strained his lungs to the uttermost, the result was not impressive. The bigness of the room seemed to swallow it up.

They listened hard for Henry's hoped-for footstep, but a deathly stillness reigned everywhere. The darkness seemed suddenly to grow thicker and more appalling. They found themselves again and again looking fur-

tively over their shoulders into the gloom behind.

"Let's give another," whispered Tommy, "both together."

"Hen-ry—HEN-RY," they yelled, at the same time kicking the door and shaking the handle. Alexander, sitting huddled on a bench just behind, shuddered at the noise, it sounded so thin and ghostly. Again they listened, and again there was no answering footstep, only a deepened sense of loneliness and abandonment.

"I b'lieve he's gone home, Tommy," whispered William in an awe-struck whisper. "Oh, what'll we do?"

Tommy for answer gave a kick at the door, but he hadn't the courage to give another shout. If you have ever tried what it feels like to shout in an empty house at night you will know that it needs some courage.

"Let's open one of the windows," he whispered after a pause. "P'raps we can make some one hear that way." He started off in the direction of the first of the six and William followed him. Aleck came, too, not liking to be left alone.

They got the bottom part of the window open without much difficulty. Outside was a courtyard entirely surrounded by college build-

ings, dark and silent as the grave at this hour, for the house in which the masters lived was on the other side in quite a different part. There is no deader-looking thing in creation than a blank, curtainless window, and four rows of them stood there staring at our unfortunate captives.

"Shall we give a shout?" whispered Tommy, and William whispered back a rather faint-hearted assent. Aleck in the background put his fingers in his ears.

That was the last shout they gave, for the result was so weird and ghastly that they had not the courage to repeat it. The courtyard echoed it back, as a sort of hollow moan, and something at the end of the room seemed to move.

"What was that?" whispered Tommy; "didn't you hear?"

"It's only the wind," answered William, whose teeth were chattering, all the same, but that may have been partly due to the coldness of the night air. Alexander drew closer to them. He was shivering all over.

They leaned out of the window and listened, but without much hope. The distant tinkle of a tram bell and the sound of noises in the street on the other side of the building brought

a faint feeling of consolation; it was at least a sign of life, but before they had time to benefit by it there came, borne on the wind, which seemed to be freshening, the lugubrious voice of (presumably) the same street singer whose ill-timed melody had accompanied their entry on this fatal night.

“Days—an’ mo-ments quick-lee fli-i-in’,” he wailed.

“Blehend—the li-vin’,—with—ther—dead.

Su-hoon shall you,—an’ I, be li-hi-hin,

Heach—with-hin—’is—nar-row bed.”

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAGEDY BEGINS

THE voice of the singer was, so to speak, the last straw. Alexander began to sob hysterically, and Tommy and William felt a chill pass right through them and out by the roots of their hair. And I think we must in justice admit that it was a rather trying situation for three small boys to find themselves in, all alone and with apparently a long night of horror before them.

"Oh, do shut the window," whispered Aleck at last. "I c-can't stand it, and I know I'm going to get lock-jaw. I can feel a s-sort of p-pain in my m-mouth even now."

They pulled the windows to with a bang, and went hopelessly back to the bench, and sat huddled together so as to keep warm.

"It's a b-beastly sort of death," continued Aleck. "They p-pull out your f-front teeth, and pour things down your throat and then you d-die."

"Some p-people say it's a good thing to d-die young," said William; "it gets you off such a lot of purgatory." He meant it well, but only

added to Alexander's distress. "I d-don't want to d-die," he sobbed.

"Haven't you b-been to your j-jooties, Aleck," said William gravely; "'cos you'd better make an act of contrition if you haven't."

"I p-promised Aggie to g-go last Sunday," sobbed Aleck. "But I d-didn't get up in t-time." The noise in the black depths behind them occurred again as he spoke, and made them all shudder and draw closer still to one another. It might have been only the wind, but it sounded ghastly enough to be anything horrible that you can imagine getting into a study place at night.

"There's n-nothing there," said William, whose teeth chattered in spite of himself; "there *can't* be anything there."

"N-no," answered Tommy, trying to follow this bold lead, "of c-course there isn't." Aleck's hopeless collapse made them both feel braver.

"Look here, Aleck," said William with a courage that I can only describe as heroic, "you st-stop blubbin' and m-make an act of contrition, and I'll go down to the other end to show you there's nothing." You may judge how far gone Aleck was from the fact that he meekly agreed to this proposition. William rose to go on his perilous mission.

“Say it properly, kneeling down,” said William, “and Tommy’ll stop with you.” Aleck obediently went down on his knees, and William started off and disappeared in the darkness. He kept up a conversation with Tommy as he went, both making vigorous efforts to keep their voices steady. Once he banged up against a desk with a clatter which made them all jump. Aleck was still on his knees making his act of contrition.

“What comes after ‘the remembrance of them is g-grievous to us,’ ” he whispered to Tommy, and Tommy, after a hurried inward repetition, whispered back, “The b-burden of them is intolerable.” Alexander continued his devotions in silence. For some moments no sound came from the bold explorer in the gloom, who seemed to be standing still.

“Are you all ri’, Billy?” shouted Tommy, who had an uneasy feeling that it somehow hadn’t sounded quite like the wind.

“All ri,” came back rather faintly from the blackness. “There’s n-nothing here.” They heard him make a step or two forward.

Then suddenly there was a muffled cry, followed by a loud clatter, and almost before they realized it a form emerged out of the darkness and William was at their side again. He

caught hold of Tommy's arm and held it tight for a minute without speaking. "Oh, T-Tommy, there *is* somethin' there. Oh, what'll we do," he gasped. They could hear his teeth chattering like castanets, and the noise of teeth chattering with fear in the dark is not a pretty one, let me tell you.

Aleck rose suddenly from his knees so frightened that he left off crying, and even forgot about the threatened attack of lock-jaw.

"It was j-just behind the m-master's desk," whispered William in terrified tones. "I heard suthin' move quite c-close to me, and then I s-saw a g-great *white face*. Oh, T-Tommy, what is it?"

"What d-did it look like?" asked Tommy.

"It had b-boots," said William. "I heard its b-boots bang against the desk."

They stood for a minute straining their ears, but no sound came from the haunted darkness. Suddenly Alexander began to giggle hysterically, making a horrid noise something between a laugh and a sob. Instinctively they felt that it was a danger signal, and William gripped him furiously by the arm. "Shut up, Aleck," he hissed out. "Chuck it, you little fool!" Alexander subsided onto the bench, making inarticulate noises.

"Aren't you s-scared, Tommy?" whispered William.

"Yes," said Tommy; "terribly."

"Will you come with me if I go b-back?" asked William. "We've got to f-find out w-what it is."

Tommy looked fearfully into the darkness, which the dim outline of the great windows served only to intensify. I doubt if in all his life his courage will ever be put to a more severe test, but he rose to it nobly. "Y-yes, I will, Billy," he whispered. "Let's hold each other's hands."

A feeble wail of protest rose from Aleck, imploring them not to leave him, but they sternly disregarded it. "You'll be all ri' here," said William. "Tommy an' me'll see you're al' ri'."

Then they started, with every nerve a-jump and hearts beating nineteen to the dozen, on their perilous journey. They had not gone very far before Aleck began his hysterical giggle again. He hoped it would make them come back.

"He's going dotty, I think," whispered Tommy, who in his heart of hearts hoped that William would find in this a reason for relinquishing the enterprise.

"Can't help it," said William; "we g-got to find out," and they cautiously continued their journey, groping their way along the wall.

About half way down the room they stopped and listened, but the lamentations of Alexander was the only sound they could hear. "Let's say some p-prayers," whispered Tommy.

"I am," answered William. "I've been s-saying Hail Marys ever since we s-started."

They stopped again at the point where the line of windows ceased, and the darkness became more intense than ever. And they knew there was something in it, something alive with a great white face and boots. It was pretty terrible.

"Who's there?" called William as boldly as he could manage. There was no answer, but just the slightest suspicion of a sound.

"You'd better speak," said William, and the sound came again more distinctly. They made a blind rush forward, cannoned violently into the master's desk, and from thence into the alcove behind. Something rose up out of the darkness to meet them, and they both flung themselves desperately upon it and came crashing to the ground. A scream of terror rose from Aleck in the distance.

It was something fairly small, and in the first

moments of pain they pummeled it unmercifully.

Then they stopped to draw breath. "It's only a kid," said William, mightily relieved.

"Let me go, you cads," came in a faint voice from underneath them (they were sitting on a prostrate ghost). "You're st-stiflin' me."

"Who is it?" said William ferociously. "Say who it is or I'll throttle you," and he groped about in the dark for the victim's throat.

"It's me," came in tones of alarm. "You jus' leave me alone."

"It's Atty, I believe," said Tommy, who had been exploring the person of their captive. "I can feel that spiky thing on his watch chain."

"Is it you, Atty?" asked William, and Attwood (for it was indeed that mathematical genius) gasped a stifled assent.

"Buck up, Aleck," shouted Tommy; "it's only young Atty been hiding." The sound of distress from the other end ceased with surprising suddenness.

"Let him get up," said William, "but don't let go his arms." They rose cautiously from the ground, hugging their captive tight.

"Le'me get my boots," said Attwood, trying to shake himself free. "I left 'em by the desk."

"If you don't keep quiet, Atty," said William fiercely, with a really masterly grasp of the situation, "I'll stamp on your toe." This demand gave him the first inkling as to the explanation of the mystery. The threat subdued Attwood at once.

"He must've come in after the lights were out to spy on us," said Tommy. "Dirty little sneak!"

"It's all right," said William cheerfully; "if we've got to stop here all night we'll have plenty of time to pay him back. You go an' get his boots, Tommy, and I'll stamp on his toes if he moves."

"Le'me go, you cads," said Attwood, and then gave a squeal of pain. It wasn't really a stamp, but a stockinged foot is a terribly vulnerable object.

"He's blubbin'," said Tommy. "I'm feeling if he's got any matches."

"He'll blub a lot more before we've finished with him," said William grimly. "Got any matches, sneak?"

"Yes, he has," said Tommy joyfully. "I've found 'em." He struck one and the light cheered them all up immensely. It showed Attwood standing on one leg and sobbing with pain. It also showed his boots in the back-

ground. Tommy immediately gathered them up.

"Give me one," said William. "Hold out your hand, you sneaking spy, and strike another match, Tommy," he added, for the first had just gone out.

Tommy struck another, and held it up like a torch.

"Hold out your hand," said William again. Attwood hesitated, but a move of his captor's foot brought him, so to speak, to his knees. He held out his hand, and William prepared to administer punishment.

"It's go-got nails in it," sobbed Attwood, and as he spoke the second match went out. At the same moment Aleck joined them.

Tommy struck another. "We mustn't be wasteful," he said. "There're only about ten more. William aimed a blow at the outstretched hand, and Attwood gave a yelp of pain. "If you don't let me alone," he sobbed, "I'll tell everybody what a funk you were in. And I'll tell 'em about your greasing the black-board."

"He's *heard!*" said Tommy, and once more they were in total darkness.

"If you'll leave me alone," said Attwood, "I'll promise not to tell anybody."

"You'll promise that anyhow," said William savagely, "but you'll get a good spanking first, young Atty. Bring him back to the door, Tommy, and we'll put 'im over a desk. Tommy seized the captive's arm, and they groped their way back to the other end. Alexander followed behind, carrying the boots.

"There's the stick they light the gas with," said Alexander, speaking for the first time; "we can lam into him with that." He went to the corner where it was kept, and after a little groping found it. Tommy struck another match. "Golly, it's got a bit of taper stuck on it," he exclaimed joyfully. "Now we'll be able to see to do it properly." He lighted the taper, and for the first time they were able to take a survey of their surroundings. The blessed light revealed a fact which they had all forgotten, a fact which, by opening out a hope of escape, drove even the pleasing thought of avenging their wrongs on Attwood, out of their heads. For it showed them that the upper portion of the partition dividing the study place from the corridor was made of ground glass with panes of sufficient size to admit of egress.

"We might smash a pane," said Tommy, gazing up hopefully. "They're big enough to get through, and there're lockers on the other

side same as on this." A row of lockers running half way up the wall afforded a convenient platform from which the operation could be conducted.

"Come along," said William excitedly; "lug up a desk and I'll see how thick the glass is." The desk did not take them up sufficiently high, but by the aid of the heaven-sent taper they found a chair, and with a little manipulation got it in a fairly secure position on the top. William climbed up, and managed to wriggle into a sitting posture on the top of the locker.

"It's beastly dusty," he said. "Give me one of Atty's boots."

They handed up a boot and watched him carefully as he got onto his knees and prepared to deliver a blow. There was a deafening crash, and William very nearly lost his balance and came tumbling down upon the anxious watchers below. But the glass was done for. A great hole in the middle of the pane showed that escape was now only a matter of time.

"Look out for your eyes, Billy," said Tommy, but for answer William commenced pounding away with the boot at what remained of the glass. In a very short time he had knocked it off clean to the woodwork, all except the corners, which didn't matter. He put his

hand cautiously through the black square and groped about. "There's lockers, all right, on the other side," he said. "It'll be quite easy."

He brushed the shattered glass aside with his cap, wriggled cautiously through the hole feet first, and disappeared, all except his head. "How much drop is it?" he asked anxiously.

"A goodish bit," said Tommy. "You'd better let yourself down gradually." William had slowly disappeared from view, and a moment later a loud crash revealed the fact that he had reached the floor of the corridor. He had performed the last part of the journey more quickly than he intended.

Tommy clambered up and peered through the hole. "Are you all ri', Billy?" he asked anxiously.

"I've ripped my coat," came back in an awe-struck voice from the depths below."

"Atty wants his boot," said Tommy, whose mind was set on greater things. "Shall I let him have it?"

"Don't you," answered the voice from below. "Keep it, case he tries to play the fool. It feels a most *hijeous* tear."

"Look out; I'm chucking it down," said Tommy, and a second later the boot fell with a resounding bang at William's feet. Tommy

disappeared and was replaced a moment later by Alexander.

"Mind how you come," said William from below; "there's a nail or su'thin' stickin' out. I've ripped my coat right open."

Alexander paused. "We'd better cut the taper in two," he said; "it's pretty long, and you can have one bit down there." He proceeded at once to put this statesmanlike project into execution, and presently his head appeared through the opening. He wriggled cautiously half way through, and then, assisted by Tommy in the rear, managed to hand one of the lighted ends down to William. He did not hand it, exactly, for the distance was too great, and he had to drop it, but the faithful taper still remained alight. William gave a genuine groan of distress. "It's ripped the whole way down," he said.

"Look out, I'm coming," said Alexander, and a moment later his legs appeared over the edge. William steered him clear of the nail, and he managed the drop skilfully. Attwood came next with one boot on, and he also alighted without accident. Tommy came last, and ripped all the buttons off his waistcoat, but he was too preoccupied to take much notice of the disaster at the moment. His whole mind

was intent on the problem as to what they were to do next.

"Hurry up," said William impatiently. "We've got to get out now. We'd better try one of the windows on the ground floor."

"Fourth Classical'll do," said Tommy; "it's quite an easy drop into the street, only we'll have to look out that no one sees us."

They started off in the direction of the stairs, when Attwood put in a petition for his boot. "Do let me have it, Billy," he said pathetically; "I swear I won't do anything, and it's beastly uncomfortable with only one."

"Shut up," said William roughly; "you won't get it till we're safe outside, you dirty little spy."

"We haven't licked him yet," said Alexander, "and he hasn't sworn not to split."

"We can't stop to lick him now," said Tommy. "It'll take too much time. But we'd better make 'im swear."

"Oh, blow the swearin'," said William; "let's get outside first," and he hurried on down the passage. The others followed, protesting. "We must make him swear," said Alexander, who was conscious of being more deeply committed than the others. Attwood limped painfully behind, the very picture of abandoned misery.

"If you'll leave me 'lone," he said, addressing his captors in general, "I'll show you a way out."

"What way?" snapped William. "There isn't one."

"Yes, there is," said Attwood; "by the yard at the back. My brother showed it me. There's holes in the wall to climb over by."

"Go on!" said William incredulously.

"There is," said Attwood. "I've been. My brother showed it me."

"Swear you won't breathe a word to a livin' soul," said Alexander, seizing the opportunity, and Attwood swore solemnly. "Say, 'I wish to die if I do,' " he added, and the prisoner obediently repeated the words. William had already gone on ahead.

They hurried downstairs by the light of the taper and Attwood showed them the proper window. All went perfectly smooth, the window opened without giving any trouble, and the drop into the yard was an easy one even for the one-booted Attwood. The yard was crossed, the wall reached, and there, sure enough, were the holes conveniently arranged for climbing.

"Give me my boot now, Billy," said Attwood; "you promised you would."

"No, I didn't," answered William, "and I

won't, either. I'm going to take it with me, and you can put it on in the street. I'll teach you to come spying, you beastly little cad." He handed the boot to Tommy and commenced to scale the wall. "You're jolly lucky to get off without a licking," he said when half way up. "If we'd stopped there I'd've made you sore all over."

He reached the top and paused for a moment, sitting astride while Tommy passed the boot up. "You'd better hurry up," he said, "'cos there's no one in the street now. I'm going to scoot off home." A moment later he disappeared from view on the other side of the wall. His captivity at least was at an end.

"I vote we make Atty come last," said Aleck as he started to climb. His damaged hand made him slower than William, but he got up all right and duly disappeared. Then Tommy mounted, leaving Attwood alone holding the now useless taper. The street was still empty, and Tommy dropped into it with a most refreshing sense of freedom and escape. William had already disappeared, and Aleck was almost at the corner, running for all he was worth. Tommy proceeded to follow his example; the thought of what Mrs. Clementina would say was beginning to trouble him. It took a good

deal to make her angry, but, as I said, when she was it was no joke.

He had barely got a hundred yards from the wall when he heard a shout behind him, a curious sort of shout it was, not very loud, but somehow impressive. His first impulse was to disregard it and hurry on; he had surely cares enough of his own to justify his leaving a traitorous spy like Attwood to his fate. But some peculiar property in the shout made him pause. He turned round and saw by the light of a street lamp Attwood apparently sitting motionless on the ground. "What's the row?" he called, not too loud, just enough to carry; but Attwood did not answer, and somehow the silence startled him. He ran back a yard or two and then stopped, because he saw that Attwood was playing him a trick. His shoulders were shrugged up and his head bent forward, just as people do when they are trying to prevent themselves from bursting out laughing, and he wasn't even trying to tie on his boot. "All right, young Atty," shouted Tommy, "you just wait till to-morrow." Then he turned and ran home as fast as his legs would carry him. He was horrified to see on passing the clock that it was nearly eleven.

CHAPTER XII

TOMMY'S EARS ARE BOXED

HE RAN the whole way, breathing scientifically through his nose, and though he never paused once to take breath, it seemed to take a tremendous time. When at last he reached Begonia Road (did I mention that that was the name of the street in which he lived?) it was altogether deserted, and in many of the houses there was not even a light. Laburnam Villa was at the farther end, and as he drew near he noticed that the front door was open. As he drew nearer still he saw with alarm that his mother, with a white shawl over her head, was standing talking at the gate to a policeman. They both turned in his direction as he approached, evidently attracted by the clatter made by his boots as he came pounding along. He pulled up in front of them, rather puffed in spite of the scientific breathing.

Mrs. Clementina promptly seized him by both shoulders and shook him so vigorously that he fairly gasped. As I said, she was a lady of monumental proportions, while Tommy at this date was fairly small. The policeman

looked on reflectively. Mrs. Clementina continued to shake him, being, as a matter of fact, greatly relieved at his appearance, and working off her recent anxiety in this way. At short intervals she demanded to know where he had been, but failed, for obvious reasons, to get any answer.

"Is it 'im, mum?" asked the policeman at length, rather unnecessarily, it seems to me, for it is hardly to be supposed that Mrs. Clementina would have adopted this peculiar form of salutation to any chance visitor. His words recalled the indignant lady to the actualities of the situation. She released her unfortunate son and turned to the guardian of the law.

"Yes, constable," she said, "this *is* the boy. This is the heartless youth on whose behalf I was about to ask you to telephone to the Chief Inspector. Take him to prison, constable, lock him up, feed him on bread and water, a wicked, heartless Bluggins. I shan't interfere," and she folded her arms and glared down remorselessly at Tommy.

The constable knew what was expected of him. It was not the first time he had been called upon to terrorize erring infancy, and in a voice of somewhat melodramatic sternness he declared that if it happened again he cer-

tainly would. But being the father of a family, he knew that that wasn't really the right line to take in the present case. He knew, as, alas! Mrs. Clementina did not, that the bogey that is formidable and frightens us at six may possibly retain a little of its terrorizing power at eight and nine, but at twelve and thirteen is nothing but a bogey stuffed with rags, a contemptible object, a thing of laughter. To be threatened with it at that ripe age is an insult alike to our manhood and our intelligence. I say the constable knew this, and he tried to convey his knowledge to Mrs. Clementina. "What 'e wants, mum," he said, as he saluted and returned to his beat, "is a good 'iding."

Now, Tommy had reached the gate of Laburnam Villa in a thoroughly repentant mood; the shaking, with its accompanying publicity, had ruffled his temper a good deal, and driven away most of the repentance, and this last unfortunate move completed the process. He walked up the garden path in front of his mother in a thoroughly rebellious, nay, revolutionary, frame of mind, determined at all costs to assert himself and let the world in general and his mother and Mrs. Golightly in particular see that he wasn't going to be treated

like a baby any longer. Mrs. Golightly, I should have mentioned, had been a witness of the great part of the scene from a point of vantage near the front door.

When they got inside, Mrs. Clementina seized him by the collar and conducted him into the studio. He tried to shake himself free, but only succeeded in bursting the button-hole, which added the last touch to his disreputable appearance. The studio was brilliantly lighted, and revealed remorselessly the state of affairs. Mrs. Clementina folded her arms and gazed at him indignantly. "I don't think, Thomas," she said slowly, "I ever saw a boy look such a disreputable Bluggins in all my life."

It can scarcely be said that the description was exaggerated. Tommy's hands were the color of soot with dust, and a good deal of it had got onto his face. His collar was unbuttoned, and also freely begrimed. His waistcoat was buttonless and torn open, and the toes of his boots bore unmistakable traces of having scraped against the wall. Altogether he presented a distressing spectacle enough for the eyes of a fond mother. Yet Mrs. Clementina was not, as might have been supposed, making a rapid calculation as to the extent of the damage done. She was, on the contrary, struggling

with a desire to come to terms and make a sketch of the offender. Visions of what she could make the subject in black and white were floating before her. "In Mischief" or "In Disgrace" or "After the Battle" would be the title, and would be just the sort of thing that would go down and sell. But she resisted the temptation, partly because she was very hurt and very angry, partly because she felt pretty sure of being able to do it from memory afterward. So instead of taking the form of a pacific overture, her first words were uncompromisingly severe.

"Now, Thomas," she said in a tone of authority, "you'll just tell me what you've been up to."

"I shan't," answered Tommy, with a defiant glare. I hope I have made you understand the sort of temper he was in.

Mrs. Clementina looked astonished, for this was not in the least like Tommy. "What, Thomas?" she said. "*What* did I hear you say? Shall I have to send for the policeman after all?"

It was the most unfortunate remark she could have made. Tommy returned no answer, but put his hands in his pockets and looked carelessly round the room.

The temptation to take a sketch again presented itself. "Don't Care" or "Defiance" would have been the title. But again the instinct of maternal responsibility asserted itself. "If you don't tell me this moment where you've been, Thomas," she said severely, "I shall just box your ears for you." Tommy continued his not very successful attempt at jauntiness, and Mrs. Clementina went to her writing desk and opened a drawer. After a little searching she drew out a wad of cotton wool.

"Now, Thomas," she said with dignity, "are you going to be a good boy and tell me, or a wicked Bluggins and have your ears boxed?" and she brandished the cotton wool before him in a threatening manner.

Tommy made no answer. He was wondering what the cotton wool was for.

"Dangerous, I know it is," said Mrs. Clementina, "but I'm going to do it. Put some of this in your ears, you wicked Bluggins." Tommy took the wool and did as he was told. It was, you perceive, a measure of precaution.

Mrs. Clementina took a turn or two up and down the room, waving one arm about as though she were trying to get her eye in. Tommy watched her anxiously. These elaborate preparations rather disturbed him.

"Aren't you going to tell me, Thomas?" she asked, pausing in her walk. Tommy shook his head. He could not surrender with honor at such a moment, though he would dearly have liked to. At this dramatic crisis a tap came at the door and Mrs. Golightly's head appeared. "Will you be taking your cocoa now, mum?" she said mildly.

The interruption irritated Mrs. Clementina and screwed her up to the necessary pitch of indignation. Without pausing to answer, she boxed Tommy's ears so soundly that she nearly knocked him off his feet. "There," she said, "I've done it." It was a dreadful mistake, of course, but unfortunately she made it, and, what was still worse, did not know she had made it. Mrs. Golightly sighed approvingly, and repeated her question about the cocoa.

"Bring it in here, please, Mrs. Golightly," said Tommy's mother in a tragic voice, "and give this wicked boy his supper in the dining-room. Go away," she continued, turning to the culprit, "and eat the meal prepared by the lavish hand of a too indulgent parent, and don't think I shall come for your candle to-night, because I shan't." Tommy went away without a word, burning with anger at having been punished before Mrs. Golightly.

Mrs. Clementina began her sketch from memory, and on the whole succeeded fairly well. It was worked afterward into an oil painting and exhibited at the Grimborough autumn exhibition, where Sir Nathan Perkins (the pill man) purchased it at the artist's price. "Don't Care" was the title eventually selected and fixed upon.

It is improbable, dear sir or madam, that you have ever had your ears boxed, for the practice has of late years fallen largely into disuse. But speaking from experience and the vivid memory of a venerable lady (God rest her soul), who in my youth sometimes boxed mine, I may tell you that the first effect is an impression that the world has suddenly exploded. When that has passed, and you see that the universe is still intact, your ears begin to burn and tingle, and all your evil passions rise up and urge you to kick somebody or something by way of protest. This explains why Tommy, who had suffered the penalty for the first time, banged the door after him as he went out, and gulped down, with ever rising wrath, the supper prepared by his too indulgent parent. The flag of rebellion, which a few minutes before had all but been hauled down, was flying now more defiantly than ever, mainly

for the edification of Mrs. Golightly, who kept coming in to see if he had finished, being anxious to assure herself that the gas was turned out before she retired for the night. Her presence intensified his cup of bitterness, for he felt certain that she must be thinking how red his ears looked, and when she said that his poor ma had been worrying about him all the evening he professed a cold-blooded indifference which he was far from feeling. Then he went upstairs to bed in about as wicked a frame of mind as he had ever been in in his life. Wild thoughts of running away, or at any rate of maintaining for the rest of his life an attitude of cold and distant reserve toward his mother, floated about in his mind and seemed at the moment quite practicable. There was a beautiful picture of Our Lady in his bedroom, hung there by Mrs. Clementina, who though she was not a Catholic herself (Tommy's father had been a convert), had a great reverence for Tommy's religion, and did all she could to encourage him to practise it faithfully. Generally he said his prayers before it, but this evening he didn't even look at it, and didn't say any prayers, and instead of folding his trousers carefully and putting them under the mattress to press out the creases, he threw them in a heap on the

floor with his other clothes, and got into bed and began to read "The Blood-stain on the Bowlder," an unedifying romance, which had been lent him by Alexander. And this in defiance of a solemn promise he had given never to read in bed, because of the danger of setting the house on fire. But you see he was asserting himself.

However, the candle didn't give a very good light, and there seemed to be something wrong with his eyes, which kept getting misty; also the "Bloodstain on the Bowlder," though there was a murder in the very first chapter, did not seem so interesting as Aleck had said (it was not really creepy murder, but just ordinary), and he soon got tired of it. He was just going to blow out the candle when the door opened and his mother appeared. The sketch had been so successful that she had come in the fulness of her heart to make peace, and had even another crystallized plum concealed in her left hand. At the sight of her abandoned Tommy reading in bed she stopped short and gave a cry of horror. "Oh, Thomas, Thomas," she cried, "and you *promised* not to."

Tommy sat up in bed and hung his head and felt exceedingly mean. His mother came across to him and seized the book. The very

inartistic picture on the cover raised her indignation to a still higher pitch. It represented one of the many occasions on which the boulder became bloodstained.

"What a thing!" she said; "and this is the sort of trash you read, is it? Where did you get it, wicked boy? Tell me this instant."

"A boy lent it me," said Tommy in a very low voice.

"Oh, *did* he, indeed!" said Mrs. Clementina. "You shall just take it to Father Genicot in the morning with a letter telling how you've been behaving, and we'll see what *he's* got to say. I *did* think I could trust you, Thomas, but my eyes are opened. I shall never be able to trust you again, never, never. I hope you'll say your prayers before you go to sleep, and ask God to make you a better boy." With that she took away the candle and walked solemnly out of the room, leaving behind her a very unhappy and conscience-stricken little sinner all alone in the dark.

So much for Tommy on this fatal evening. We have still to see William and Alexander to bed, and let us, by way of relief, take Alexander first, as his fate was the less tragic. He, like William, ran hard all the way to Ros-

common Street, but, unlike him, he paused at the corner and took off his boots, because, unlike William, he had been thinking as well as running, and, as usual, had espied a possible means of avoiding detection. His aunt (a mild lady, it is true, but even a maiden aunt may turn and stop your pocket money, or possibly write a letter) had said she would not be home till late. There was just a chance that his sister might be out for the evening also, and in that case the latch of the front door would be up, and if he could slip in without being heard by the servants no one would know exactly what time he had arrived. All depended upon not being heard by the servants, because the cook at least would certainly be burning for vengeance for the Constable Robbins episode of the afternoon. Now, the kitchen was in the basement, and if he had walked to the front door or even crossed the street to it he would certainly have been heard, so, as I say, he took off his boots at the corner. There was no one about to notice and think it eccentric.

Everything was as he hoped. There were no lights in any of the front windows, except those of the kitchen, which meant that neither his aunt nor his sister had returned. He crept cautiously along the front of the house and

up the steps to the front door, and found it unlatched. He managed to open and close it without attracting the attention of the watchers below—a remarkable feat, for though he did not know it, the kitchen door had been left open for the express purpose of timing his arrival. In the dining-room he found his own supper ready laid, but he did not stop to partake of it, but carried some bread and butter with him upstairs, and scattered a few crumbs about to allay suspicion. Within ten minutes of his arrival he was in bed and the candle extinguished.

Not long after that he heard a cab draw up, and the voices of his aunt and sister in the hall. He crept cautiously out of bed and listened at the top of the stairs. The cook, to his inexpressible consolation, was conveying, with various alarming conjectures, the unfounded intelligence that he was not in yet. The cook's voice was powerful, and could easily be heard; his aunt's reply arrived at the top of the stairs in the form of an inarticulate murmur; apparently she was incredulous and protesting. Then he heard his sister suddenly chime in. "At any rate, cook, he's had his supper," she said. Her voice, too, was clear enough and had a touch of defiance in it. Miss Aggie was

always ready to fight Aleck's battles. She wasn't one of the snubbing sort of elder sisters, more's the pity. Her remark was followed by one of those silences more eloquent than words, and the cook was heard descending the kitchen stairs. What she said when she got to the bottom ought to have made Alexander's ears tingle almost as hotly as Tommy's were doing at that very moment. "An artful little rascal" was the least vigorous of her strictures. The object of them returned to bed with a sigh of relief, and waited for the situation to develop.

It developed rapidly, but on quite the right lines. His aunt came upstairs with a candle and entered the room on tiptoe, shading it carefully with her hand. Aleck did not pretend to be asleep, but opened his eyes at once, and smiled a wan smile. "Have you had a nice day, aunty?" he said in his gentlest tone.

"Yes, dear," answered his aunt. "But why aren't you asleep?" She came over to the bed and put her hand on his forehead. "Why, you're quite hot, Aleck," she said in a tone of alarm. "Don't you feel well, dear boy?"

"Ye-es, aunt-y," Aleck answered in the hesitating manner which long experience had taught him would certainly have the desired

effect. "I *do* feel a little hot," he added—the odious little humbug. He was supposed to be delicate, and traded on the fact habitually in the most shamefully unscrupulous manner.

"Oh, Aleck!" said his aunt, rising to the bait without hesitation, "I do *hope* you haven't caught cold. I must take your temperature at once," and she bustled anxiously out of the room, returning almost immediately with a thermometer, which she put into his mouth. He sat up in bed with it sticking out like a cigarette, and ought to have felt ashamed of himself, but I'm afraid he didn't. The strap from Captain May's biggest portmanteau would have been more to the point than a thermometer, I can not help thinking.

The temperature proved to be normal, to Alexander's disappointment, as he had been cherishing a secret hope of getting off going to school next day. Miss Comoran, on the other hand, was greatly relieved. "I'll just give you a cooling draught, dear," she said, "and then I think you'll be quite comfortable," and she went away to prepare it. Of all the many foolish people we have met in the course of this narrative, she was far and away the most foolish, and I declare I have no patience with her. I can almost find it in my heart to forgive

Alexander for his many detestable vices when I think of the way he was brought up. Ignorance in her case was no excuse, for there was Mrs. Captain May next door only too ready to give her the benefit of her rich experience as a mother of nine. She came back with her silly cooling draught, and Aleck swallowed it gratefully, and went peacefully to sleep.

Meanwhile, as will be easily understood, a very different scene was passing next door, at No. 5. William's absence was first noticed at supper, and Matthew, when questioned on the subject, could give no information. "I don't know what's coming over that boy," said Mrs. May reflectively. "I shall have to teach him a lesson. This sort of thing *won't do*." It took a good deal to upset Mrs. May, but when the time for night prayers arrived, and still no signs of William, she began to get really anxious, and sent Matthew out to the end of the street to see if he was coming. All the junior branch of the family—that is, all the family up to and including Susannah—had gone to bed by this time, and when Matthew returned empty-handed, declaring that he had been almost to the college, there was a general feeling of consternation, and a sort of family council was held to decide what was to be done. The

council was still sitting and had almost come to the conclusion that Matthew had better go out again and consult the presiding policeman when the front door bell sounded a modest tinkle.

"Bring him in *here*, Matthew," said Mrs. May rather grimly, and Matthew, with a pleasing sense of importance, went out to arrest the delinquent.

"Got locked in, couldn' 'elp it," gasped William breathlessly as soon as the door was opened. Matthew did not answer, but re-fastened the front door in ominous silence. He had intended to maintain this dignified silence the whole time, but William's dust-begrimed and dishevelled condition startled him into speech. "Good Lord, Billy," he said, "what 've you been up to?"

"I couldn' 'elp it," gasped William. "I go' locked in. Can I change m'coat?"

"I've got to take you straight in, Billy," said Matthew magisterially, grasping him firmly by the arm. "My, won't you catch it when she sees that tear." With which comforting remark he marched his prisoner across the hall and into the room where the council was sitting. "Here he is, mother," said Matthew. "He says he got locked in."

“Well, young man,” said Mrs. May severely, “this is a nice sort of night-time to be coming in, isn’t it?” And then she saw his coat—which was a new coat, not one of Matt’s cut down—and then the storm burst. If you have ever been in a storm of that sort yourself you will know what it was like, and if you haven’t, no words of mine can describe it for you. Besides, I doubt if William would like me to describe in detail all that happened. Sufficient to say that if he cried himself to sleep that night (under the bedclothes so that Matthew should not hear), it was not because he did not get any supper, for a kind elder sister smuggled some up on the quiet, nor for any other physical suffering whatsoever, but solely and entirely because the dreaded blow had fallen, and he was not to be allowed to go down to meet the *Bulurwayo* next time she arrived in port. He was thinking of the Captain from the heights on the bridge of the steamer waving his hand to the family group on the dock wall, looking out for William, and William would not be there. And with a bursting heart he was thinking of that last interview in the Captain’s cabin. And so, having found at last one entirely honest Black Brother, let us close the record of this disastrous day.

CHAPTER XIII

A MOST DRASTIC PUNISHMENT

TOMMY woke up next morning in a very chastened and repentant frame of mind, and said his prayers before the picture of Our Lady with unusual fervor. It seemed quite clear to him that the reason why everything had gone so hopelessly wrong the night before was because of his running away from Mrs. Clementina when she waved to him with her umbrella. He felt pretty sure that she had wanted him particularly that evening, and you couldn't expect Our Lady to help you if you were doing that sort of thing. But what troubled him most was the thought that he had broken his promise about reading in bed. To do him justice, he worried much more about that than about the threatened letter to Father Genicot, and he made up his mind to tell his mother he was sorry, and to promise again and never break it as long as he lived. He turned over in his mind many plans for making her see that he was really sorry, and he put the first one into execution at once by going down to the back kitchen and blacking, not his own boots only, but

the boots of the entire household, including even a pair of Mrs. Golightly's, which I must say I think was almost heroic. Then he washed his hands and went out to Mass. He generally served Mass at a church in an adjoining street, and on his way he thought that if Father Somerville were still in his box when he got there he would go to confession, too. It was not the proper day, but he was feeling strongly the necessity of doing something unusual. Besides, he was not sure that breaking your promise like that might not be a bad sin.

Father Somerville was in his box, and likely to remain there some time, for he was hearing the confession of Miss Francesca Kellerman, which was always a somewhat lengthy proceeding. The ingenious person who always supplies us with abundance of good reasons for not going to confession suggested to Tommy that the good father would be anxious to begin Mass, and would not care to hear any more that morning, but Tommy stuck to it and went in after Miss Kellerman, and came out feeling very much happier. Father Somerville was a very old friend; he had received Tommy's father into the Church and had known Tommy ever since he was a baby. He knew Mrs. Clementina, too, and he understood the state of

affairs exactly. Tommy, by his advice, went to Holy Communion, and walked home to breakfast, feeling, in spite of all the thunder-clouds ahead, positively happy and fuller than ever of good resolutions and purposes of amendment. Mrs. Golightly was in the hall when he arrived, and told him that his mother had a bad headache and wasn't coming down to breakfast. His heart sank a little at the news, and he asked anxiously if it was very bad. Mrs. Golightly feared it was. "You never know, Master Tommy," she said mournfully. "There's many a one in his lone grave this minute as began no more 'an with a bad headache," she added, by way of a cheerful comment on the situation. She then retired with a sigh to the kitchen to prepare Tommy's breakfast.

Tommy knew Mrs. Golightly and her peculiar philosophy too well to be much depressed by her lugubrious forebodings, but he was sorry not to be able to see his mother, being extremely anxious to get rid of the cloud under which he felt he was at present lying. On the other hand, if she did not come down she would probably forget to give him the letter, and there was distinct consolation in that thought. Tommy had never had a letter of this sort be-

fore, and felt distinctly uncomfortable on the subject. Mrs. Clementina had a peculiar way of putting things which she felt might easily be misunderstood and given a more sinister interpretation than was intended. During his solitary breakfast he tried to look over some lessons, having, as we know, been sadly distracted during the night studies of the evening before, but most of the time he was thinking about the letter. After breakfast there was still half an hour before he need start for school, but instead of following the dictates of prudence and going on with his lessons, he went into the studio to see if there were anything useful he could do there. Mrs. Golightly had already swept it out, so he arranged all the chairs in a neat row along the wall, and seeing that the flowers in the vase on his mother's writing table were rather faded, he took them out and substituted some of his own choice from the garden. Then he began to clean some brushes which obviously needed cleaning, and was busily engaged on this penitential task when his mother appeared on the scene. She was wearing a dressing gown of geranium-colored taffeta with black velvet decorations. Mrs. Golightly was perfectly correct, she *had* a very bad headache, and moreover she had received

two bills by the morning post, and a reminder that the gas and water rate was due. Tommy's escapade of the night before had upset her terribly, and a hurried perusal, during the watches of a rather sleepless night, of "The Bloodstain on the Boulder" served to increase her distress. She came in carrying the offending volume between her finger and thumb, and holding it out before her as though it were a contaminating object.

"What are you doing with my brushes, Thomas?" she said sharply as she entered. "I do wish you'd learn to leave things alone."

"I was just cleaning them for you, mummy," said Tommy humbly, though this unexpected severity rather took the wind out of his sails. Mrs. Clementina did not answer, but sat down rather violently at her writing desk and pulled open several drawers. It was an unpropitious moment, but Tommy's good resolutions were very strong, and time was precious. "I'm sorry I was reading in bed," he said suddenly, without any prelude.

"Well, I should just think you *ought* to be, Tummas," said his mother. "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I wouldn't have believed it of you. Here, take this horrid book away, and give it to Father Genicot."

I should like to know what he'll say about it!"

"I won't d-do it again, really I won't," said poor Tommy, mopping his eyes, but Mrs. Clementina was too sore and indignant to be moved to pity.

"I *hope* you won't, Thomas," she said, "but how do I know? I can't trust you now; that is the dreadful thing, I can't trust my only offspring when he promises me faithfully not to. Oh, it's no good crying like a baby; I'm not going to be weak and let you off. Sit down here, and write exactly what I say." She rose from her seat and pointed majestically to it. Tommy did as he was told, and sat down and sorrowfully mopped his eyes. On the desk in front of him was a sheet of Mrs. Clementina's best cream-laid note paper with "Laburnam Villa, Begonia Road," artistically engraved in claret-colored letters at the top.

"Dear and Reverend Sir," said Mrs. Clementina suddenly, and Tommy looked up for a minute for a momentary hope that this term of endearment was addressed to himself, and that peace and forgiveness were coming at last. But his mother frowned back at him severely. "Write it," she said, "with a capital R," and Tommy understood then that it was for Father

Genicot, not for him, and wrote it in his best copperplate.

"My son Thomas," continued Mrs. Clementina, standing like a statue, with folded arms, "returned home last night at eleven P. M., comma, having previously disobeyed me in the most deliberate and heartless manner, full stop. Have you got that down, Thomas?"

"Yes, mummy," said Tommy, after a short pause.

"Furthermore, comma," continued Mrs. Clementina in a more majestic voice than ever, "in spite of his solemn promise to the contrary, comma, I found him reading in bed—*two notes of admiration.*"

Tommy looked up imploringly. "I won't do it again, mummy, *really* I won't," he said in a tearful voice. He had hoped that this crowning and most shameful iniquity might be left out of the catalogue of his sins. But Mrs. Clementina was not to be moved. "Understand once and for all, Thomas," she said severely, "that I will not be hectored and bullied, so don't attempt it. Begin a new paragraph." Again there was a pause. Tommy looked up anxiously at his mother, who seemed to be gathering strength for a last final denunciation. As a matter of fact, she was struggling with

another temptation to throw duty to the winds and sketch Tommy's woe-begone and tear-stained face. But as before she resisted it. "Yes, Tummus, *I will*," she said with decision. "Write this very clearly and underline the last part of it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, mummy," Tommy answered meekly.

"Having in view the cold- (hyphen) blooded (underline that, too) and undutiful character of the offense," she said in an awful voice, "I must beg you—to administer—without delay—*condign punishment of the most drastic description*. Your obedient servant—give it to me now and I'll do the rest," she added.

Tommy wrote down with a rather shaky hand this last terrible sentence, wondering what it meant, and relinquished his place at the desk. Mrs. Clementina sat down, looked over the letter, added an omitted "g" to the word "condign," and signed it with the wonderful, flourishing signature which has adorned so many works of art. Then she addressed an envelope, sealed it up, and gave it to Tommy. "There, Tummus," she said, "give that to Father Genicot as soon as you get to school. If you will behave like a Bluggins you must be treated as such, my cherub."

Tommy took the letter submissively and put

it into his breast pocket. "Please, mummy, what does it mean?" he asked timidly.

"Never you mind what it means, Tummus," answered Mrs. Clementina grimly. "It means something altogether *ghastly*, I can tell you that. It means birch rods and canes and cat-o'-nine-tails and all sorts of horrible things that bite. You'd better go off to school now or you'll be late."

Tommy turned to go. "Good-by, mummy, dear," he said, but so softly that Mrs. Clementina didn't hear him. She was occupied in pitching poor Tommy's floral decorations into the waste-paper basket. These were, it is true, rather crude as to the color scheme, and she thought that the designer was Mrs. Golightly, but it made a lump come in Tommy's throat all the same.

His spirits sank lower and lower the nearer he got to school. It seemed no good being sorry, because the more you were the more everything went wrong, and besides, he began to be vividly conscious of all the dangers and difficulties that lay immediately ahead. There would certainly be a most tremendous row about the broken window, and very probably this terrible letter would lead to his being suspected of having something to do with it, and

in that case there would be another bill. Besides, they hadn't put the money on Mr. Colquhoun's desk after all, so the class would probably be kept in again and be savager than ever. Altogether things looked about as black and awkward as they well could look.

He was turning these gloomy thoughts over in his mind, and so engrossed by them that he hardly noticed where he was going, when he heard his name called, and saw William coming toward him. There was nothing in William's appearance in any way calculated to raise his drooping spirits. William's usually cheerful face wore a woebegone expression and his whole bearing was that of one upon whom misfortune had laid her hand heavily. He walked for a little while without speaking.

"Did you catch it much, Billy?" said Tommy at last, by way of breaking the silence.

"I'm not goin' to be let go down," said William with an ominous quiver in his voice. "I don't care about anythin' now." In face of such a calamity Tommy could find no words of consolation, and discreetly looked the other way.

"What did *you* get, Tommy?" asked William at length, with the air of one who, though doomed himself, is yet not insensible to the woes

of others. "Was your mother in much of a rage?"

"Pretty bad," answered Tommy; "she—she boxed my ears."

"*That's* not much," said William rather contemptuously.

"She's given me a letter, too," said Tommy, not to be robbed of his just title to commiseration. "She says I've got to have condign punishment of the most drastic description. D'you know what 'drastic' means?"

"No," answered William. "It sounds pretty bad, though. I sh'd think it means you've got to be hammered some way."

Tommy sighed deeply. "We never put the money on after all," he said. There was a long pause, in the course of which they reached the street directly leading to the college. Suddenly William stopped short. "Look here, Tommy," he said, "suppose we sag."

In case, dear sir or madam, you do not know the meaning of the word, let me explain that it corresponds to what our great-grandfathers called playing truant.

"We're both bound to catch it about as bad as we can," William continued, abandoning for the moment his tone of despondency. "And I don't see why we shouldn't have something for

our money. We might go down to Crabbington and have a sort of picnic. Do let's, Tommy."

Tommy hesitated; he was startled, and not a little attracted by the bold proposal. It was a nice day, and the evening seemed a long, long way off. "Scrumptious Crabbington," as we know from the pictures of it at all the railway stations, is a delightful place, and he had four and ninepence in his pocket. Also the idea of leaving Alexander to face the music alone was, I am afraid, not altogether an unpleasing one. And so he hesitated. I don't defend him, mind, but, oh my dear reader (for we are all human), have *you* never put off a disagreeable duty and gone down for the day to Scrumptious Crabbington? Have *you* never deferred, let us say, the visit to the dentist, which all the dictates of right reason combined to urge upon you?

"I've never sagged before," said Tommy slowly, and William pointed out (correctly, so far as logic was concerned) that that wasn't a reason.

"Young Simmons got——"

"I know he did," said William hastily, "and so'll we. But we'll get it anyhow. Do come, Tommy."

From where they stood they could see the

school distinctly, and the boys pouring in at the big gates. Tommy looked at it, and thought longingly of Scrumptious Crabbington, "the Mentone of England," to quote the advertisement, and then he made up his mind.

"No, Billy," he said with a sigh of genuine regret, "it isn't worth it. We might lose two or three halves besides." There were other reasons not unconnected with his visit to Father Somerville, but he naturally said nothing about that. But he spoke in so decided a tone that William saw the decision was final. In gloomy silence they marched stolidly toward the fateful gates. Only once was the silence broken, when William asked what had become of Attwood. "He was sitting on the ground laughing," said Tommy bitterly. "Dirty little spy, I'll give him something to laugh about when I see him."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAGEDY DEEPENS

IF, DEAR sir or madam, you have so far regarded Tommy and William as no better than two irresponsible infants; if, so far, you have considered that they brought their trouble on their own heads and got no more than they deserved, however hard the judgment you have, no doubt, correctly formed, I think, I really think that you will be sorry for them now. They expected that something terrible would be awaiting them within those familiar gates, and were bracing themselves up to face it courageously; one of them at least was really sorry and had resisted temptation, and in spite of discouragement still retained quite a considerable amount of that store of good resolutions with which he had started the day. But they never dreamed that in a few moments after entering a blow would fall upon them which would leave them paralyzed with horror and tasting a sorrow such as, in the mercy of Providence, we do not often have to taste when we are young. They never dreamed (who would, indeed) that the sun was

suddenly going out and darkness coming over the whole land. Perhaps you thought I was joking when I said we were coming to the tragedy, but alas! it was no joke, and in a moment or two now we shall be plunged right into the very thick of it.

They went straight to Father Genicot's office when they arrived, and William promised to wait outside. There was somebody in with him, but he came out almost at once, and there were two waiting already, but they were short cases (letters of excuse for no home work, which only needed countersigning), and they were dispatched in less than five minutes. Then Tommy, with a beating heart and a repetition of the cold shivers of the night before, went in and presented Mrs. Clementina's missive.

Ordinarily he wasn't at all afraid of Father Genicot, who, though he could be awkward on occasions, was generally very good natured and affable, and not stricter than circumstances actually required. Indeed, he did not look the sort of master you would be afraid of, being rather inclined to stoutness, with a fresh complexion and curly hair just beginning to turn gray. Long experience of the erratic ways of boyhood had made him very wise, though his methods and plans of action were occasionally

a puzzle to his younger colleagues. He was often mild in cases which seemed to them to call for exceptional severity, and again sometimes stern with offenders whom they would have let off with a caution. But the most exacting of his critics would have admitted that he knew his business, and that in his hands the discipline of the school was safe enough. In private the boys generally called him "Daddy Jim," and even "Jimmy."

Tommy watched him hard as he read the letter, and noticed that once his mouth twitched in a queer way, almost as though he were going to laugh, which of course must have been a mistake. When he had finished reading it he looked at Tommy. "You wrote this yourself, didn't you, Tommy?" he said.

"Yes, Father," answered Tommy. "My mother made me."

"And didn't you know how to spell 'condign'?" asked Father Genicot, who always took a certain amount of time to get to the point.

"No, Father," said Tommy. "Please, Father, I don't know what it means."

"Well, look it up, then," said Father Genicot; "there's a dictionary over there," and he pointed to a book-case at the other side of the room. Tommy did as he was told, and began

turning over the pages of the book. Father Genicot returned to the letter and read it over carefully again. He was trying to make out what was at the bottom of it. Tommy was not at all the sort of boy to behave in the way described.

"Well, have you found it?" asked Father Genicot, and Tommy said he had.

"Read it, then," said Father Genicot.

"Merited, suitable, deserved," said Tommy.

"Hum!" said Father Genicot. "Couldn't you give any reason why you got in so late, now?"

"Please, Father, I got locked in the study place," answered Tommy. "Please, I ran the whole way home, really I did."

"You had something to do with that broken pane of glass, then, I suppose," said Father Genicot. "Did you tell your mother you got locked in?"

"No, Father," said Tommy, rather shamefacedly.

"Hum," said Father Genicot again (it was his favorite expletive). "I should fancy you were in a bit of a temper last night, weren't you, Tommy?" he added. Tommy did not answer.

"I've known boys before now," said Father

Genicot slowly, and with the air of one drawing upon quite an inexhaustible store of experience, "quite honest, decent boys, who forgot clean all about their promises when they were in a tearing rage and were as sorry as could be afterward." He looked benevolently at Tommy, and two large, tell-tale tears trickling slowly down saved him the trouble of any further questioning.

"Perhaps your mother didn't quite understand how it came about," he suggested.

"She says she'll n-never t-trust me again all the rest of her li-life," sobbed Tommy.

"Oh, yes she will, Tommy; don't you worry," said Father Genicot. "I can put in a good word for you up there, you know. I can write and say I've always found you perfectly straight and trustworthy, and perhaps I might hint how you came to make such a bad mess of things last night." Tommy looked up gratefully.

"But what about this disobedience?" Father Genicot continued, taking up the letter. "Was that temper, too?"

Tommy shook his head.

"That was really cold-blooded and deliberate, wasn't it?" he asked, and Tommy nodded.

"Well! well!" said Father Genicot after a

short pause; "we all make mistakes sometimes, don't we? Let's try to look on the bright side of things. I'll write to your mother to-day, and then see what she says. You must tell her you're sorry, you know."

"Please, Father, I have," said Tommy, "but it didn't make any difference."

"Well, tell her again," said Father Genicot. "Keep on telling her. We'll see about this condign punishment business later on. Go to your class now and come to me after morning school for the letter."

Tommy hesitated. "Please, Father," he said nervously, "I think I'd better get something. She—she won't like it if I don't."

"Hum!" said Father Genicot. "You think you deserve something, do you?"

"Yes, Father," said Tommy.

"Well, you can ask Mr. Atkins to give you as many as you like," said Father Genicot. "You can go and see if he's in his room now." Tommy departed with an expression of gratitude more sincere than is usual on such occasions. Father Genicot at once began the letter, and a very skilful performance it was, for what this Father did not know about the great and difficult art of writing letters to parents is not to be counted knowledge. He

wrote it, as I say, and sealed it up and put it on a shelf to be called for, and there it remained until it was covered with dust and at last torn up and thrown into the waste-paper basket. For Tommy never came back for the letter, and what is stranger still, I doubt if he ever thought of it again. Nor did he go to Mr. Atkins and ask for twelve (the number he had decided on), because when he opened the door of Father Genicot's office and walked out into the corridor he walked into another world as well, into that land of darkness and misery to which I have already alluded. The first person he saw on getting outside was William, not the William he had left only a few minutes before, but a William with his face as pale as a sheet and his eyes large and round with horror. By his side stood Smart, a boy we have caught a glimpse of once before as one of the pursuers of Alexander, and Smart's face, too, was a good deal whiter than usual. Directly Tommy appeared William seized him by the arm and dragged him down the passage without saying a word. "What on earth's the row, Billy?" said Tommy, frightened in spite of himself by the look on William's face. Not until they got into a dark and unfrequented corner did he get any answer. Then William stopped and

began to sob as though his heart would break.

"What *is* the row, Billy?" said Tommy rather angrily. "Why can't you tell me?"

"He's *d-dead*," sobbed William.

"Who's dead?" asked Tommy, terribly startled, and with a thought of Alexander.

"Atty," answered William. "Oh, Tommy, what'll we do?"

"Who told you?" said Tommy sharply, struggling with an overwhelming fear.

"Smart," answered William between his sobs. "He says he got it from Potter, and Potter said a kid who lives in the same street as Atty saw him carried home on a stretcher last night. Oh, poor old Atty!"

"Did he get run over or something?" said Tommy. William gave no answer, and Tommy felt that cold fear climbing slowly up from his chest into his throat.

"Don't you know, Billy?" he whispered. He couldn't manage more than a whisper. William nodded, and Tommy waited in silence. They could hear in the distance the tramp of the boys' feet as they trooped in from Mass. "He f-fell off the wall and b-broke his back," gasped William under his breath; and then Tommy knew the worst, and a picture of

Attwood sitting on the ground all hunched up and quiet came back to him with horrible vividness, and he saw that what looked like laughing might have been something else. There was a long and dreadful silence. Both were thinking of the same thing and afraid to utter it. Would Attwood have slipped and fallen if he had given him back his boot?

The great bell rang for the beginning of school, and sounded somehow strange and uncanny and awful, not in the least like the bell of ordinary days. They looked at each other, and William mopped his eyes and tried to leave off crying. "What'll we do? Whatever'll we do?" he asked, but Tommy did not answer at once. He was wondering why Father Genicot had said nothing about this awful thing, and whether it wouldn't be better to go to him at once and make a clean breast of it. His indecision was cut short by the sudden appearance of Mr. Noldin. "Now, then, get on to your school room," he said, and they moved mechanically away.

In the school room they found the class already assembled, but not Mr. Colquhoun, which was a thing absolutely without precedent. Every one looked scared, most of all Alexander, who carefully avoided looking their

way. They were talking about Attwood in a hushed whisper, and different versions of the story were floating about. Some said he wasn't dead, but only dying, and others that some one had pushed him over the wall and hit him on the head with his own boot. They were so preoccupied that the entrance of Tommy and William was scarcely noticed, and they went and sat down in their places without a word.

A few minutes later Mr. Colquhoun arrived, and said the usual prayer, in which the class joined with quite unusual fervor. But instead of beginning the lesson in the ordinary way, Mr. Colquhoun took out his pocket handkerchief and blew his nose violently, then he cleared his throat and rearranged the three pieces of chalk. The class watched these unaccustomed maneuvers in awful silence.

"Boys," said Mr. Colquhoun at length, not quite in his usual voice and with some hesitation, "I have, I am sorry to say, some very sad news to tell you. Poor little Attwood—er—met last night with a very serious accident while climbing over the wall at the back of the college playground. Father Genicot asks you to pray for him. I am sure—er—all will." Then he stopped suddenly, and there was a deathly silence in the room. Potter at length put the

question that every one wanted to ask, but no one liked to. "Please, sir," he said, "is he in any danger?"

"I fear so, Potter," answered Mr. Colquhoun, who was obviously very much upset. "News of the accident has only just arrived at the college, and no details are known yet. Father Genicot wants to see you in his room at once, Browne," he added, turning to Tommy.

Immediately some twenty-five pairs of eyes were turned upon Tommy, who got up at once in a dazed sort of way and walked slowly to the door. He could feel the eyes even after he got outside, and he has never forgotten the look in them. Most of us get through life without ever being stared at in that way.

At the door of Father Genicot's office he paused for a moment and tried to pull himself together a little, because he was trembling all over and could hardly keep his teeth from chattering. Inside he heard the voice of Dr. Whales, which did not tend to reassure him much. Like most of his fellows in the lower school he was undisguisedly and wholeheartedly afraid of Dr. Whales.

Still, it was no use waiting. It had to be done, and he knocked at the door. But the knock was so extremely modest that the voice

of Dr. Whales entirely swallowed it up, and it wasn't heard. He knocked again rather louder.

"Come in, there, come in," came cracking through the door like a pistol shot, and Tommy went in. The Reverend Dr. Whales was at all times an impressive figure, being six feet high and broad in proportion, but at that moment he looked positively terrific. The boys had several pet names for him (to use the word advisedly, for he was very popular with them), the "Bird of Prey" or just simply the "Bird" or "Birdie" being the most suggestive. In moments of excitement or enthusiasm he used to wave his arms about a good deal, and looked very much like a great black eagle on the watch for its prey. And Tommy, as he went in and looked timidly up at this tremendous apparition, might fittingly have been compared to a sparrow or other small fowl on whom the mighty bird was about to swoop. Tommy glanced appealingly at Father Genicot, who was sitting at his desk and looking at him, but Father Genicot's face was almost as stern as that of Dr. Whales, and showed no trace of sympathy or encouragement.

"Come here, Browne," said Dr. Whales, pausing in his walk (he was striding, as his custom was, up and down the room). "Come

here. I have to speak to you on a very serious matter, mind, and Heaven help you if you don't tell me the exact truth!" Tommy gasped, but said nothing.

"Were you with Attwood last night, Browne? Yes or no, nothing else, mind, nothing else," he spurted out.

"Yes, Father," gasped Tommy.

"Were you with him when he climbed over the wall?" Dr. Whales extended a long arm in Tommy's direction, and looked so awful that he could not at first get out a word. "Yes, Father," he managed to stammer at last.

"Did you see him after he had fallen?" pursued Dr. Whales, and Tommy again assented.

"And you left him lying there, did you, Browne—you left him lying there, and didn't go for help?" Tommy nodded and shrank back as Dr. Whales stooped forward toward him. He thought he was going to be seized hold of, and instinctively put up his arm, but it was something worse than that. "Heaven help you, boy," said Dr. Whales, "Heaven help you. Do you know you've as good as murdered the poor lad?"

At these awful words all the pent-up grief and horror in Tommy's soul burst out, and he gave a sort of wail (you must remember he

was only a small boy, after all), and began to sob and cry and leaned up against the wall, hiding his face. Dr. Whales commenced striding up and down the room again, muttering, "Silly fool," but the abusive words, let me hasten to explain, were addressed to himself, not to Tommy, and he made a gesture in Father Genicot's direction, indicating that he resigned all further conduct of the matter into his hands. Father Genicot acted with his usual circumspection. He waited for a few minutes, and then called Tommy by his Christian name, and made him stand close by his chair, and put one hand on his shoulder by way of encouragement. Dr. Whales looked on gloomily from afar. He was angry with himself and ready to do penance, being, in spite of appearances, a kind-hearted man.

"Now, Tommy, you'll answer everything I ask you, won't you?" said Father Genicot in his most benevolent tone, and Tommy sobbingly promised.

"You were friends with Attwood, weren't you, quite *good* friends?"

"N-no, Father," said the weeping Tommy, and Father Genicot began to feel uncomfortable.

"But you weren't out of pax with him, were

you?" he continued; "you hadn't got any grudge against him, Tommy?"

"Y-yes, Father," said Tommy, thinking of nothing less than of defending himself. Father Genicot paused for a moment. A less wise and experienced man would have jumped to a rash conclusion at once (with goodness knows what disastrous consequences), and would have thought the next question quite superfluous or perhaps have feared to put it.

"Why did you run away, Tommy? Why didn't you call for help?" he asked, and drew Tommy a little nearer to him.

"B-because I th-thought he was l-laughin' at me," sobbed Tommy. Dr. Whales snorted, but Father Genicot knew that they were being given truth of a sort that only the innocent and clean of heart can give, and with a few more judicious questions had the state of the case perfectly clear, to the admiration and astonishment of Dr. Whales. Then he set to work to comfort Tommy, who needed comfort badly, and succeeded as well as could be expected, and sent him back to the school room almost restored to his right mind.

"Father James," said Dr. Whales in an impressive voice as soon as Tommy had departed, "you're a wonderful man. I don't know why

they made me head master with you knocking about the premises. Father Genicot took a small pinch of snuff (his only vice) and looked modestly deprecating. But I should not be surprised if in his heart of hearts he was wondering the same thing. For, to use for a moment the language of our heroes, Dr. Whales' blunder had been a most hideous blunder, and he certainly ought to have known better.

CHAPTER XV

DISSOLUTION OF THE BROTHERHOOD

OF ALL the odious and detestable things that people do, there are few more altogether odious, more completely detestable than the act of listening at keyholes to hear what is going on inside. If ever you find any one doing that, dear sir or madam, go straight up to him and kick (or otherwise assault) him as hard as you can; kick him, no matter how big he is. It will be an act of true charity, and even if he turns and kicks you back again (as he very probably may do), you will have suffered in a good cause and your scars will be honorable. I say this solemnly and with all deliberation. For boys or men who listen at doors, and thank God I have met very few of them in my life, the only course possible, the only course dictated by charity, is to kick them often and kick them hard. If the process has no other result, you will at least have made them understand that you disapprove of their proceedings.

This digression is by way of an apology, for it is now my painful duty to introduce (only for a moment or two; I shall bundle him off the

stage as soon as possible) a boy who committed this mean and ugly offense. He was going down the corridor at the moment Tommy entered Father Genicot's office, and he waited outside and listened. I will not tell you his name, nor yet what class he was in. Suffice it to say that he was old enough to have known better, and if some one had caught him at it and have acted in the way I have suggested, a great deal of unnecessary suffering would have been avoided.

For he overheard Dr. Whales' unfortunate remark about "as good as murdering him," and he did not stop to listen to Father Genicot's less sensational cross-questioning. He went back to his school room and let it be known that Dr. Whales had been heard shouting at the top of his voice (that exaggeration was necessary, you see—it was so loud that he could not help hearing him) that Tommy Browne was a murderer. Things of that sort travel rapidly in a school, and indeed in other places besides schools. It flew from mouth to mouth during the intervals of changing classes, and by the time for morning recess it became a well-established fact. Various and somewhat contradictory details were given, but it was generally agreed that Tommy had pushed him off the

wall at the back of the college, having previously lured him thither in some manner undefined. In the lower forms they took it for granted that he would be hanged, the Seconds and Thirds wavered between hanging and penal servitude for life, the Fourths still believed in transportation to Australia, while the Fifths and Sixths considered that the most likely penalty would be several years in a reformatory. But one and all left off regarding him as an ordinary boy, and a few considered that even the above drastic penalties would be insufficient to meet the heinousness of the offense. Attwood had a good many friends among the boys of his own age, for, besides being a mathematician, he was good-tempered and enterprising, as witness his ill-fated attempt to bring their guilt home to the Black Brothers. These friends, among whom Potter was one of the most faithful, considered that hanging would be much too good for Tommy, and when, at the beginning of recess, he tried to escape to the washing place, they headed him off and forced him to go into the playground, in the hopes that something would be done to him.

In this hope they were disappointed, for the prevailing sentiments were curiosity and

horror. Curiosity made them ask questions, to which they got only "yes's" and "no's," and horror made them gather round him and stare in silence, just as sheep get round a wounded sheep and do nothing but stare. Some told him he would be hanged, and some asked him if he thought he would be hanged, but there was no feeling of indignation against him, the horror swallowed that up. When Potter, by way of an experiment, pulled off Tommy's cap and threw it on the ground, he was immediately suppressed. It was instinctively felt that *that* was not the proper way to deal with a case like this. One or two boys were almost sympathetic and gave him advice as to how to conduct his defense, recommending him to get Sir Algernon Bickerstiffe, K.C., if he could—Sir Algernon having figured largely in a recent murder case.

To Tommy himself it began to seem more and more like a bad dream, and the one thing he longed for was to get away from the solemn, staring eyes, and for some one to speak to him as though he were ordinary Tommy Browne once more. He looked round anxiously again and again in hopes of seeing William or even Alexander, but neither appeared to be in the playground. In this he was mistaken; they

were both there, but kept carefully away from the crowd round Tommy.

Alexander, as a matter of fact, was trying to convince William that what they ought to do was to leave Tommy to his fate. Their owning up would not make things any better for Tommy, and there was no reason why they should all be hanged or sent to a reformatory. If any questions were asked about William coming home late, he (Alexander) would say he had been with him and that they had both been down to the docks. Alexander, as you may suppose, was in a horrible fright, and did his level best to persuade William, and thought he had succeeded. He drew a harrowing picture of the distress of William's family when the news arrived, felt sure that his own aunt would die of the shock, and very likely William's mother, too, so it seemed to be a positive duty not to say anything. William answered nothing and, as I say, appeared to be agreeing. Alexander felt so sure that he had succeeded that, to allay suspicion, he proposed that they should join the crowd round Tommy.

It was an unfortunate move. Alexander was clever, but there were a great many things he did not understand, among them that with some people there may be more powerful mo-

tives in life than the desire to save their own skin. For when William saw Tommy looking dumbly round at his tormentors, and answering "yes" and "no" to their awful questions, he suddenly made up his mind for himself. Ignoring Alexander, he began to push through the crowd toward Tommy. Alexander seized his arm, but he shook him off angrily and continued to push forward. In a minute or so he was at Tommy's side. He was welcomed eagerly by the crowd.

"He won't tell us anything, Billy," said Potter. "You see if you can make him." William's heart began to beat at a terrific pace, but he answered quite steadily. "Don't want to," he said; "know all about it misself."

The crowd gathered in more closely. They were going to hear something at last, it seemed. Tommy had probably taken William into his confidence.

"Go it, Billy, has he told you?" said somebody excitedly. William was standing close to Tommy now, and out of sight behind he felt Tommy's hot hand creep into his. There was a moment's pause.

"'Cos I was in it, same as Tommy," he said bravely enough, though the tears started to his eyes as he spoke.

When he said that the crowd drew away a little and left them standing side by side, and no one spoke for a few moments. "Some one'd better go and fetch his brother," said an awe-struck voice, and it is to be supposed that somebody did, for a very little while afterward Matthew appeared on the scene. He strode through the crowd, which made way for him on both sides, and so right up to where William and Tommy stood.

"What's this, Billy?" he said in his best prefectorial voice. "You were with Attwood, too, last night?"

"Yes, Matt," said William meekly. He was glad he had done it now, and gripped Tommy's hand tighter.

"And you had something to do with his getting hurt?" said Matthew. William nodded.

"Please, May," said a voice from the crowd, "he said he was in it same as Tommy."

"You kids just cut off," said Matthew, turning suddenly round. They moved off about half a foot and Matthew promptly cuffed two or three heads. Then they moved off further.

"Does Daddy know, Billy?" asked Matthew, not in the prefectorial voice this time, and William shook his head.

"Well, you'd better come and tell him, then,"

said Matthew. "Tommy can come, too," and he promptly led the way out of the playground, Tommy and William obediently following. When they had got clear of it he suddenly stopped.

"Did they find out or did you own up on your own, Billy?" he asked, but William made no answer.

"Please, May, he came up and did it on his own," said Tommy, "didn't you, Billy?" William, for no particular reason that I can see, began to mop his eyes.

"The Governor'll be glad you did that, Billy," said Matthew, and continued the journey to Father Genicot's room.

Father Genicot was in, and did not seem at all surprised when William made his confession. He made it thoroughly, making it quite clear that he was mostly responsible for not letting Attwood have his boot and bringing in even the damaged blackboard, though that seemed a very small and unimportant matter now. Father Genicot said he had just been to see Attwood, and that he was in great pain, but the doctor couldn't say exactly yet how serious the injury was, and that there was to be a further examination in the afternoon. Then he sent them away, telling them that they

need not go back to the playground. As they were going out he beckoned to Matthew to stop.

"Matt," he said when the door was closed, "you must try to help your little brother through this." He spoke so gravely that Matthew looked up in alarm. "Is he—is he going to die, Father?" he asked in an awe-struck voice.

"I hope and pray not," said Father Genicot, "but I'm afraid he's terribly hurt, poor little boy, and unless the doctor has made a mistake things look very bad. It'll be a dreadful blow to Willy if anything happens. You can tell your mother, but don't tell Willy just yet."

"Will he be tried, or anything?" asked Matthew anxiously, and Father Genicot said that that of course was out of the question. "But he'll blame himself, Matt," he said, "and he's at an age when it's difficult to see things in their right proportion."

"He owned up of his own accord," said Matthew rather huskily. "Lots of kids would have been afraid."

"Not Captain May's kids, I fancy," said Father Genicot with a smile, and Matthew smiled back again. Father Genicot and Cap-

tain May were old friends. "When's the ship due in?" he asked.

"Not for a month yet, Father," said Matthew, and Father Genicot sighed.

"Well, look after him, Matt," he said, "and the other poor little beggar, too, if you can. He'll want help as much as Willy." Matthew promised, and went away not a little troubled. He and William might not have appeared to the casual observer to be extraordinarily devoted to each other, but things like this are real revelations.

He waited for William after morning school and offered to go home first and tell them about it. William gratefully accepted; the first interview with his mother was one of the things he had been dreading. "Don't you be a coward, Billy," said Matthew reassuringly; "the mater won't be down on you, and I'll tell her you owned up on your own." But in spite of this encouragement William was desperately frightened, and grew more and more so the nearer he got to No. 5 Roscommon Street. He gave Matthew a good quarter of an hour's start, so that he should have plenty of time to explain matters. Tommy, it was arranged, should go round to Attwood's house and see if he could pick up any information. He had decided not

to go home to dinner at all, and spent part of the four and ninepence on some light refreshments. He felt somehow that he could not explain how matters stood to Mrs. Clementina, and that she would think he was sulking.

When William at last arrived at No. 5 the family were at dinner, and when James Arthur, whose seat commanded a view of the front door step, announced that it was Willy, Mrs. May rose from her seat and went to the door. "Go on talking, and don't take any notice," she said to the family in general, and the family did its best. The two elder girls and Matthew kept up a spasmodic conversation, and Susannah, who was inwardly in a state of great agitation, devoted herself feverishly to the youngest of all, who was still in the high chair and feeder stage. James Arthur, "like a well-conducted person," as the poet says, "went on eating bread and butter," only it wasn't bread and butter, but suet pudding.

William was standing in the hall when his mother came out, trying to screw up his courage to face the family. He looked up anxiously as the dining-room door opened, but the hall was rather dark and he could not see her face. He thought for a moment that Matthew had made a mistake, because she came over to him

without speaking. And then, almost before he knew what had happened, he was in the place made specially by God for little boys whose troubles are too big for them, and getting the comfort he so sadly needed from the truest fountain of comfort in the world. "Mother's glad you owned up, Willy, and we'll have a Mass said for him, and ask God to make him well," said Mrs. May, but these are only one or two of the wise and comforting things she said, things that won't go down in writing because they are hardly words at all. She may have been a holy terror with a masculine temperament, but at times like this one mother is worth all the maiden aunts that ever brewed weak tea.

As for Tommy, he went mournfully, and still in a rather dazed condition, to Attwood's house, and stood for a long time gazing at it from the other side of the street. There was absolutely nothing to tell of the dreadful tragedy passing within, and when a baker's cart stopped in front of it, the baker's man rang the bell in quite the ordinary way and stood whistling at the door as though everything were just as usual. He speculated as to which window was the window of the room where Attwood was lying, and tried to draw consolation

from the fact that all the blinds were up. If Attwood were actually dying, surely some of them would have been pulled down. But then of course he might be in one of the rooms at the back, and they might have forgotten about the front windows. If any one had come out of the house he meant to ask him how things were going, but no one did, and after waiting a long time, and making a fruitless attempt to get a view of the back of the premises, he abandoned his watch and went to a restaurant in a neighboring street, where he had a frugal lunch, which cost altogether only sixpence. He was just on the point of spending the odd threepence on some variegated chocolates by way of cheering himself up when the sight of a plate of bananas suggested an idea. Bananas were good for invalids, and he bought six-pennyworth and took them round to Attwood's house. He rang the bell and gave them to the servant when she came, and said, "Please, is he any better?" The servant did not think he was, but did not seem very inclined to be communicative, and shut the door as soon as possible. He caught a glimpse of a hospital nurse inside, which made his heart sink.

At school in the afternoon things were very much the same as they had been in the morning,

except that now he had William at his side, and the crowd had two to stare at instead of one. The master left them considerably alone, and the whole class seemed strangely cowed and depressed, Attwood's vacant place appearing to exercise a strange, hypnotic influence over them. No one seemed inclined to speak above a whisper, and even when they had to answer questions they did it in a very low and subdued voice. Several of them before they went home put up candles before the Lady statue in the church.

At the end of school Tommy and William went to Father Genicot's office to see if he had any news, but he was not in, and no one could tell them anything of his whereabouts. As they were coming away they met Alexander, who looked exceedingly uncomfortable when he saw them, and glanced furtively over his shoulder to see if he were being observed. When he had assured himself that no one was watching he came up and spoke. "I say, Tommy," he said hurriedly, in a low voice, "you won't split on me, will you? Swear you won't split." Tommy made no answer, but looked sorrowfully at the speaker. "You *are* a coward, Aleck," said William with conviction. "I wouldn't be such a coward to save my life."

"I'm not," said Alexander. "It's—it's because of my aunt; she's—she's awful delicate, you *know* she is, Billy."

"No, it isn't," answered William uncompromisingly. "It's because of yourself, you dirty little sneaking coward. If you want to stop being a Black Brother, why don't you say so?"

Alexander paused a moment. "Yes, I do," he said, "if you'll swear not to split."

"All ri'," answered William, "we'll swear not to split, won't we, Tommy?" Tommy did not answer at once. Strange as you may think it, he was really fond of Alexander, and looked up to him in a way. "Aren't you really goin' to back us up, Aleck?" he said at last rather wistfully. "We've always backed *you* up."

"No, I'm not," answered Alexander hotly, "and it's beastly unfair of you to ask me. I hadn't anything to do with the silly plan, and it wasn't me that wouldn't give Atty back his boot, and now you want to get me dropped on jus' because you're going to be, and Billy goes and calls me names because I won't."

"I'd cry about it if I were you," said William scornfully. "Did ums then, poor little Aleck?"

Alexander glared wrathfully at the speaker, and had serious thoughts of violent measures of retaliation. But only for a moment; the in-

instinct of self-preservation rapidly asserted itself. "Mind, you've sworn not to split, Billy," he said; "you can't back out of it now."

"Don't call me Billy," said William furiously. "I'll never speak to you again as long as I live, nor will Tommy, will you, Tommy?" Tommy shook his head more in sorrow than in anger, seeing that the once trusted brother was indeed bent upon desertion.

"You're not a Black Brother any more," said William; "you're kicked out."

"Who cares?" said Alexander loftily. "I'll tell all the chaps about your mother spankin' you."

"You can," said William; "they'll only think you a more dirty sneak than they did before." And with that they parted, as you see, in deep anger. The Black Brotherhood, that strange, mysterious association, had for the moment ceased to exist. For the union between Tommy and William now was something more than a union between two Black Brothers.

CHAPTER XVI

UNCLE JAMES

TOMMY and William determined to go round to Attwood's house to see if they could get any news as to what the result of the examination had been. But on the way thither they met Father Genicot, who told them that the doctors had only just begun, and that the result was to be sent to him as soon as it was known, and that if they would come round to the college about half past six he would let them know what there was to be known. He asked them if they had said any prayers for Attwood, and curiously enough they had to answer "no." They had up till now been too stupefied by the shock to pray, but when Father Genicot suggested that it might be a good thing, and that now was the time, they fell in with it at once and went off together to the College Church. When they came out Tommy said he would have to go home now, and made William promise, in case he should not turn up at half-past six, to come to his house and tell him the news. He was not quite sure what the result of his staying away from

dinner would be, and thought it quite possible that he might be kept prisoner for the rest of the day. William promised faithfully to do so, and considerately asked no questions. Then they parted, little dreaming how different things would be when they met again, and how tragic the circumstances of that meeting.

All the way home Tommy was trying to make up his mind what he would do. If Mrs. Clementina was still indignant it would be very difficult to tell her, and, on the other hand, if he did not tell her, she would certainly think he was sulking. He was still undecided when he reached the front door of Laburnam Villa. He opened it as noiselessly as possible, and directly he opened it he saw a formidable sight. On the very artistic hat-stand hung a large top hat, and leaning against one of the equally artistic hall chairs was a large umbrella. If they had been tigers crouched to spring, or an infuriated Zulu with an assegai poised in the air, they could scarcely have caused him more alarm and consternation. He stood as though spellbound, gazing at these (in themselves) harmless and even useful objects. For every glossy inch of the top hat, every mathematically accurate line in the neatly folded umbrella proclaimed the presence of Uncle James.

Uncle James was the rich uncle I have already referred to. By profession he was a chartered accountant, and by religion a Non-conformist, and here let me say at once, as he will appear in these pages in a somewhat unfavorable light, that he was a thoroughly good, honorable, God-fearing man, well-meaning and charitable according to his lights. If, like Dr. Whales, he did later on a very cruel thing, he did it entirely without malice. He managed all Mrs. Clementina's business matters for her free of charge, and he would have paid for Tommy's schooling if his mother would have consented to his going to a non-Catholic school. But in spite of her poverty, Mrs. Clementina was firm on this point. The wishes of Tommy's father were sacred to her.

But in spite of all his virtues and his readiness to help, it is probable that Uncle James did not approve of Tommy, and it is undubitably certain that Tommy did not approve of Uncle James. Apart from the fact that from his earliest infancy Uncle James had been held up to him (mostly by Mrs. Golightly) as a model to be imitated, an example of virtue crowned by success, a paragon of perfection who had, in his youth, never worn out his trousers or come into the hall with muddy boots or

held his knife and fork in an unorthodox manner, his actual visits had, especially in recent years, been nearly always times of suffering and misfortune. For Uncle James, mainly with a view to proving that Tommy was not being properly taught, had contracted the intolerable habit of subjecting his unhappy nephew to *viva voce* examinations in mathematics. Now, mathematics, as I have hinted earlier in this story, was not Tommy's strong subject, and he generally made a pretty bad mess of Uncle James's conundrums. The more hopelessly he floundered, the more remorselessly his examiner pressed his irritating questions, and whenever Tommy made a more than usually appalling blunder he would glance with uplifted eyebrows at Mrs. Clementina, who would in turn look reproachfully at Tommy and shake her head with the air of a pained senior Wrangler, though it must be admitted that her own attainments in this branch of learning were of the slenderest, and she always added up her accounts on her fingers. Once or twice, goaded beyond endurance, Tommy had lost his temper and been sent out of the room, and that of course proved Uncle James' point still more conclusively. "That lad is being neglected *shamefully*, Clementina," he would

say with conviction. "When I was his age, I assure you," and so on, and so on. But I wish he could have had a few words with Dr. Whales on the subject, or even with Mr. Colquhoun!

So now, perhaps, you will understand, at least in part, why the sight of Uncle James' top hat and umbrella affected Tommy so painfully. He stood rooted to the ground, staring at them, and debating whether it would be better to fly or to creep upstairs and hide in the bathroom. He was still undecided when the kitchen door opened and Mrs. Golightly came out. When she saw Tommy she (as usual) sighed deeply, and without speaking, went to the studio door, tapped and opened it. "Master Tommy's come, mum," she said, and then Tommy abandoned himself to his fate, and when she beckoned to him, obeyed and entered the studio.

Uncle James and Mrs. Clementina were taking afternoon tea together, and Uncle James was in the act of drinking. He put his cup down solemnly on the little table near him when he saw Tommy and held out a large, white hand. "How do you do, Thomas," he said in a deep voice. "Come here, my boy, I want to talk to you." Tommy came and

shook hands rather sheepishly, only to find that his uncle had secured firm hold of his coat. It was the usual preliminary to one of the hated examinations.

"What's this I hear about you, Thomas?" continued his uncle, and gazed at him searchingly. But as Tommy did not know (although he may have guessed) he made no answer.

"Did you give Father Genicot my letter, Thomas?" said Mrs. Clementina from the other side, and Tommy answered in a very sulky voice that he had.

"Oh, come! come! come!" said Uncle James, accompanying his words with a slight shake. "That will never do; that's not the way to speak to your mother. Haven't you been taught the fifth commandment, Thomas?"

"And I hope he gave you a good whipping, Thomas," chimed in Mrs. Clementina, anxious to avoid a dangerous subject. "Did he?" Tommy made no answer, for those are not the sort of questions that ought to be asked, least of all where there are Uncle Jameses present.

"Answer your mother at once, Thomas," said Uncle James, with another shake, more vigorous this time, but Tommy still kept silence and glared defiantly at his captor.

"Oh, Thomas, how *can* you be so naughty?"

said Mrs. Clementina, annoyed that her maternal authority should be thus disregarded. But still Tommy held his tongue and pressed his lips together to signify that he intended to maintain that attitude. Uncle James drew out an enormous gold watch with a very loud tick, and glanced at it. "I'll give you half a minute to answer, Thomas," he said, "and then we shall know what to do," and he glanced significantly at Mrs. Clementina. But a hundred such threats would not just then have drawn a reply from Tommy. Uncle James took a sip from his teacup and then glanced at his watch again. "Time's up," he declared, and he again looked in the direction of his sister-in-law. Mrs. Clementina rose from her chair and solemnly rang the bell. A moment later Mrs. Golightly appeared at the door.

"Mrs. Golightly," said Tommy's mother in a solemn voice, "will you kindly pack a portmanteau with Master Tommy's things? Please get it ready at once."

"And call a cab, please, too," Uncle James chimed in in his deepest bass—"a four-wheel cab."

"Yes, mum, yes, sir," answered Mrs. Golightly with her usual air of resigned sorrow, and immediately withdrew. Tommy's eyes be-

gan to open wide. This was more than he had bargained for, a good deal.

“Your uncle’s going to take you home with him, Thomas,” said Mrs. Clementina, “and is going to try to teach you to be a better boy. *I* don’t want any wicked, disobedient Blugginses in *my* house.”

This startling information took Tommy so completely by surprise that for a moment he was too astonished to speak or do anything. Then he began to realize the horror of it, and without more ado jerked himself free and bolted. The door was ajar, and he did it so quickly that he was in the hall before they fully grasped what had happened. Then Uncle James sprang from his seat, upsetting the table with his teacup on it in the process, and gave chase, Mrs. Clementina following behind. The front door was closed and rather difficult to open quickly, and Mrs. Golightly in the kitchen made the back door impracticable. The only possible lines of retreat were therefore reduced to the dining-room and the stairs. The dining-room being a *cul de sac* with impracticable windows, he chose the stairs, and went up them three steps at a time till he got on the top landing. His pursuers halted at the foot, and he heard his mother calling to Mrs. Golightly.

The top landing was almost as hopeless a blind alley as the dining-room, for the skylight leading out to the roof could only be reached with a ladder, and the two attics, though they had locks, were unprovided with keys. It was too late to go back, however, and seek a safer shelter, for already the firm step of Mrs. Golightly could be heard on the landing below. Capture seemed only a matter of seconds—and with capture the appalling prospect of being delivered over and handed to Uncle James—when suddenly fortune, so to speak, thrust into Tommy's hands a powerful and most unlooked-for weapon of defense, one which enabled him to bring Mrs. Golightly's upward progress to a sudden and permanent standstill.

I have, I think, previously hinted that Mrs. Clementina Browne was extremely nervous on the subject of fire. It was partly on account of this that she had attached such importance to Tommy's promise not to read in bed. Among the precautions against the dreaded element she had placed at convenient spots in her house a number of Patent Imperial Squelch-it-out Hand Fire Extinguishers. They were painted red and shaped like a half-open umbrella, and you had only to press a handle at the broad end to make a jet of fire-extinguishing fluid spout

out from the point. Now, one of these machines was, as it happened, placed on the top landing, and as Mrs. Golightly's head appeared round the corner Tommy caught sight of it, and with a grasp of the situation worthy of Alexander himself, seized it in both arms and presented it at the enemy. Mrs. Golightly saw it and at once stopped short at the foot of the last flight of stairs. Pursuer and pursued eyed each other in silence, and Mrs. Golightly (need I say it?) sighed.

"Put that thing down, Master Tommy," she said a little anxiously. "Now, be a good boy, do," she added after a pause, becoming more conscious of the difficulty of the situation. Tommy, for reply, sat down on the top step (the extinguisher was rather heavy) and aimed the nozzle carefully at Mrs. Golightly's head.

"Put it down, there's a love," said Mrs. Golightly with so much ill-concealed hypocrisy that Tommy's anger was aroused. "I'll let it off if you come any further," he said quietly but firmly. Mrs. Golightly, shaking her head reprovingly and recklessly, made a step in advance. "Look out, then!" cried Tommy, and raised the weapon slightly. His pursuer again stopped short.

You may take it for granted that at every

point in the subsequent proceedings Mrs. Golightly sighed (with varying degrees of intensity), so I shall not mention the fact again. Being sadly deficient in imagination, the possibility of any other course than that of an unmasked frontal attack did not occur to her. Accordingly she halted irresolutely and stood gazing helplessly at the threatened apparition alone. How long she would have thus remained I can not even guess, a long time probably, for she was very patient. But suddenly from below the voice of Mrs. Clementina startled her into activity. "What ever *is* the matter, Mrs. Golightly?" that lady's voice was heard inquiring. "Why don't you bring that naughty boy down?"

Mrs. Golightly retreated a few steps and leaned over the banisters. "Please, mum," she called, "I can't get at him."

"What *nonsense*," answered Mrs. Clementina. "Tell him *I* sent you."

"Your *mar* sent me," said Mrs. Golightly, obediently but unnecessarily, because the dialogue must have been audible all over Laburnam Villa. Tommy made no reply, but hugged the Patent Squelch-it-out a little more closely.

"Don't you hear?" repeated Mrs. Golightly, not that she could really have entertained any

doubt on the subject, but because she could think of nothing else to say. "Your *mar* wants you."

"Don't care," said Tommy defiantly. He naturally wasn't going to let Mrs. Golightly think that he felt his position at all insecure.

"He says he doesn't care, mum," repeated Mrs. Golightly. A confused murmur containing a strong element of Uncle James arose from below, and Mrs. Clementina was heard ascending the stairs. Tommy's heart began to beat rather fast.

Mrs. Clementina on arriving on the field of battle grasped the situation at once. "Do you mean to say, Tummus," she said, "that you're going to let that thing off and spoil the carpet?" she inquired.

"I won't if you won't send me away," said Tommy, offering the only possible term of surrender.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mrs. Clementina, keeping, however, well out of range, for she had on a very beautiful tea-gown. "Put it down at once." Tommy shook his head.

"Do you think I'm going to be dictated to by a naughty little boy?" asked Mrs. Clementina, without, however, making any forward movement.

"Be firm, Clementina, be very firm," came booming up from Uncle James below. But it was all right for Uncle James to talk. He was well out of range.

Mrs. Clementina turned and descended a few steps in the direction of the hall. "James," she called, "lend me your umbrella for a moment, please." Uncle James, extremely mystified and under the impression that it was to be employed as an instrument of chastisement, passed it up, not without inward misgivings, for it was a very handsome umbrella. Mrs. Clementina returned to the battlefield and unfolded it. As a strategist, you will perceive, she was infinitely superior to Mrs. Golightly.

"Now, Mrs. Golightly," she said, stepping into shelter inside an adjoining room, "hold that in front of you and you'll be quite safe."

"Yes, mum," said Mrs. Golightly, but without any enthusiasm, taking the proffered shelter and trying to arrange it so as to get as much cover as possible. It was a large umbrella, but however you held it, it left important regions exposed.

"Go on, go *on*, *do*," said Mrs. Clementina from her place of shelter. "What *is* the good of waiting? If you do let it off, Thomas, I'll ask your uncle to thrash you." Thus urged

and encouraged, Mrs. Golightly went on, holding the umbrella well before her and ducking low so as to get as much cover as possible. After three steps she paused and peered cautiously round the edge, but the sight of the nozzle pointed full at her made her withdraw it rapidly. "For goodness' sake, go on," came in impatient tones from the rear.

"If you come another step I'll fire it off, really I will," cried Tommy in a clear treble voice, so clear that Uncle James heard it distinctly and wondered what on earth was happening. The remark was to some extent inspired by what Sir Vere Vereker says to Captain Bludgeon in "The Bloodstained Bowlder." "Is anything wrong, Clementina?" called Uncle James. "Shall I come up?"

"No, no, James, stay where you are," cried Mrs. Clementina in alarm. "Go on, Mrs. Golightly, for heaven's sake don't stop dawdling there any longer. Why *ever* don't you go on?" Mrs. Clementina, you will remember, was out of range.

And then the crisis came. Mrs. Golightly, after one pathetic glance to the rear, gallantly went on, and crossed the Rubicon, so to speak, and mounted another step. Now, if his mother had been behind the umbrella I feel sure that

Tommy's sense of duty would have prevailed and that he would have surrendered quietly. But if you have ever had in your hands anything, from a pop-gun to a Mauser rifle, that will go off, you will remember how irresistible the temptation to let it off is. If on the top of that you call to mind that the umbrella was Uncle James' umbrella, that it afforded a most tempting target, and that Mrs. Golightly, who has even in the short space of time covered by this narrative behaved more than once with (let us be studiously mild) conspicuous want of tact, was behind it, you will perhaps be able to understand, though certainly not to approve, the line of action followed by Tommy. For, obeying the instructions printed in large letters on the side of the machine, he banged the trigger hard, and standing up, directed the nozzle straight at the center of the advancing umbrella.

The Patent Imperial Squelch-it-out Hand Fire Extinguisher did its duty nobly. After a premonitory cough, and a sound like steam escaping, it launched forth a jet of fire-extinguishing fluid so vigorously that it poured over the edges of the umbrella and onto Mrs. Golightly's head. Goaded to madness, and uncertain as to the nature of the fluid, she dashed

recklessly forward, seized one of Tommy's legs, and dragged him, still hugging the extinguisher, ignominiously down the stairs. The umbrella suffered the most, for the nozzle of the extinguisher, and also one of Tommy's feet, went right through it, and I should not like to say how many ribs were broken. In the efforts to save it from further damage Mrs. Golightly stumbled and fell, so that when Mrs. Clementina, attracted by the noise of the scuffle, strayed out from her place of refuge, what she saw was a confused heap of Tommy, Mrs. Golightly, and battered umbrella, over which the Patent Imperial Squelch-it-out was impartially, and with gurgles of enjoyment, pouring a flood of fire-extinguishing fluid, at five shillings a gallon.

Her first thought was for the carpet. With a shriek of horror and dismay, so loud that it brought Uncle James three steps upstairs, she implored Mrs. Golightly to pick up the machine and stay the havoc. "Get up, get up," she cried, frantically wringing her hands and gathering up her skirts, and almost dancing with impatience. "Look at the carpet, look what it's doing, my *new* carpet. Oh, the wicked, wicked Bluggins! Why don't you pick it up? Can't you see that it's being *ruined*?" But when

you have been freely besprinkled with a fluid, which for all you know may be a dangerous and corrosive acid, and which is trickling down your face, new carpets, however precious, cease to occupy the first place in your attention. Instead of dashing to the rescue, Mrs. Golightly sat up and mournfully mopped her face with her apron. It was Tommy, now thoroughly frightened and subdued, who first rose to his feet and tried to stop the damage. He picked up the extinguisher and put his finger in front of the nozzle, in the vain hope of staying the flow. But like the man in the Arabian Nights, he found he had raised a spirit too strong for him. Instead of stopping, it gave a grunt of delight and sportively sent forth a spray in all directions, besprinkling the walls, the ceiling, and, horror of horrors! even Mrs. Clementina herself. A few drops even went over the banisters and fell on the bald part of Uncle James' head.

Mrs. Clementina's shriek of horror was so awful that Tommy dropped the Patent Squelch-it-out and almost fell downstairs. It had the further effect of recalling Mrs. Golightly to her senses, too. She scrambled to her feet, seized the extinguisher, and carried it to the nearest window, where, with many coughs

and gurgles of enjoyment, it disgorged what remained of its contents upon a flower-bed in the neighboring garden. Mr. Appleby, the proprietor, was subsequently much puzzled to know why the flowers in that bed (a particularly choice variety of *calceolaria*) withered up suddenly and died.

Mrs. Clementina watched the operation from afar, and only when all was safe did she sally forth again. Then she went up to Tommy, and without any preparatory cotton wool this time, boxed his ears as soundly as any small boy's ears were ever boxed. Then she picked up Uncle James' umbrella, and hooking the handle into the collar of Tommy's coat, pushed him ignominiously in front of her downstairs. Uncle James retreated before them (the second shriek had brought him up three steps more) and stood in the hall exclaiming, "Good heavens! God bless my soul!" and other such expressions of surprise and displeasure, eyeing the while not so much Tommy or his indignant mother as the forlorn and desecrated umbrella.

Mrs. Clementina deposited Tommy in the middle of the hall, where he stood dripping with fire-extinguishing fluid, and forlornly mopping his eyes with a very damp pocket handkerchief. She then seated herself on the stairs, and Uncle

James, seeing that an explanation was coming, established himself on one of the artistic hall chairs. They sat there in silence for a little while gazing at Tommy, around whom a regular pool was rapidly collecting.

“Look at that boy, James,” said Mrs. Clementina at last. “Look at him well. You might think he was sorry, but he isn’t. He’s thinking of other ways of ruining me, that’s what he’s doing. If you hear one fine morning that we’ve all been burned in our beds, you’ll know what it means.” She paused tragically, and Tommy gave an incoherent gasp which might have meant anything.

“For twelve years and more,” continued Mrs. Clementina, pointing at the culprit, “for twelve long, weary years have I toiled and moiled day and night for that heartless little Bluggins, and this is how he rewards me! How any child of mine can be so deliberately wicked I *can not* think. But I’ve had my lesson, James. No more indulgence for me, thank you. What’s he *done*, did you say? *He’s gone and let off a horrid fire extinguisher all over my beautiful new carpet. That’s* what he’s done, nothing else. That’s how he thinks an obedient, dutiful son should behave to a too indulgent parent. He lets off fire extinguishers and

spoils her dress. Take him upstairs and thrash him, James; beat him; whip him; that's all he cares about. Thrash him within an inch of his life," and she made a dramatic gesture.

Uncle James cleared his throat. His thoughts were still on the umbrella, which stood, a battered wreck, leaning against the banisters. "He seems rather damp, Clementina," he said, doubtfully looking at the quite extensive pool of fire-extinguishing fluid which now surrounded Tommy.

"Of course he's damp," said Mrs. Clementina impatiently, "but I suppose he can change his clothes. Go up and change them at once," she said, rising and making way, and without a word Tommy obeyed. His mother pointed dramatically to the liquid trail which followed him.

"Four and sixpence a yard, *sale price*," she said indignantly, meaning the carpet.

A few minutes later Uncle James followed Tommy, and administered the chastisement which all right-thinking people will agree had been richly deserved. Uncle James' methods were early Victorian, but effective; he had the umbrella to avenge, and it was an extremely subdued and chastened Tommy that accompanied him back to the studio and stood sub-

missively in the corner until the four-wheel cab arrived. The conversation going on in the background did not tend to raise his spirits, for Mrs. Clementina was declaring her intention of sending him away to a boarding-school, and Uncle James was warmly approving of the plan, and saying that he knew of several in which special attention was paid to mathematics, good manners, and our duty toward our parents. Even when the time for parting arrived, and Mrs. Golightly, carrying Tommy's bag, solemnly announced that the cab was at the door, there was no sign of forgiveness.

"Good-by, Thomas; you've broken my heart, that's what you've done," said Mrs. Clementina, and Tommy, for answer, only gave his mother a powerful and affectionate hug, so powerful, in fact, that she thought he was trying to beg off.

"It's no good, Thomas, I shan't be weak," she said, and Tommy gave her another hug even more energetic.

"I'll go, mummy," he sobbed in a whisper (so that Uncle James shouldn't hear), "but I am sorry, *really* I am."

She watched them depart from the studio window, and felt very sad when the cab passed out of sight. Poor lady! She was entirely

mystified and very much troubled about other things besides the carpet. And yet, if she could only have got inside, it was all so simple and easily forgivable. But then if we could only get inside people, as a wise Frenchman once said, it would be perfectly easy to forgive and be nice to everybody.

CHAPTER XVII

NO. 56 PULTENEY STREET

THE cab selected by Mrs. Golightly was a particularly mournful and seedy cab, and as it rolled at a funeral pace down Begonia Road, Tommy from his place beside Uncle James began to experience an overwhelming feeling of forlornness and abandonment. It was not so much the sense of his own wickedness, though that was bad enough, but a vague, indefinable fear of something that was going to happen. The thought of Attwood and the result of the doctor's examination, which the stirring events of the last hour had driven away, came back now with fearful vividness, and he reflected that he would not be at home to receive the news from William, and would have to wait till next morning, and might miss it even then, because his mother had talked as though he was to be sent to the boarding-school straight away.

Uncle James maintained a chilling silence during the whole of the journey—his eyes fixed alternately on the ruined umbrella, which occupied the front seat, and the table of charges for

the hire of hackney carriages, which, neatly printed on a glazed tablet, was the only adornment of which the cab could boast. Once or twice he sighed, as though troubled by the figures on the tablet, and once or twice he glanced out of the window to see if the cabman was going by the shortest and most direct route. Beyond this he gave no sign of life, and the noise of the wheels and the shuffling trot of the seedy horse alone broke the silence. The cab in its long history had never probably carried two more depressed and uncommunicative fares.

At last they arrived at Uncle James' house. It was a large and rather imposing house in an eminently respectable street. The front door was painted a somber green, and adorned with a large and highly polished plate with "Mr. James B. Browne, Chartered Accountant," engraved in large letters on it. Tommy had often been there before, though never of his own accord, and would scarcely have felt a greater sinking of heart if the cab had drawn up before the doors of the city jail. He meekly took his bag (it was quite a small bag) from the cabman, watched Uncle James pay the fare, and followed him up the steps to the front door and waited till he had unlocked it with his

latch key. "All hope abandon ye who enter here" was what he felt, though not being a student of Italian literature, he did not exactly express it in those words, or indeed in any words at all. He just looked miserable and waited.

They had scarcely got into the hall before a door opened and a lady dressed in black made her appearance. This was Tommy's Aunt Maria, of whom he had scarcely thought till now, for Aunt Maria at all times reflected, without any personal additions, the views, opinions, and even to some extent the personal peculiarities of Uncle James, and therefore in a situation like the present was a negligible quantity. She looked surprised when she saw Tommy, and was apparently about to salute him in the conventional way when Uncle James raised a large and prohibitory hand. "No, Maria," he said; "Thomas, I am sorry to say, has been a very naughty boy."

"Oh!" exclaimed Aunt Maria, drawing back as though she thought it was catching. "Dear me! dear me!" she added, gazing reproachfully at Tommy, "how very, very sad."

"He has," continued Uncle James, "as you see, not only wantonly ruined my umbrella, but misbehaved in other ways very seriously."

"How shocking!" said Aunt Maria; "how truly deplorable."

"For the present," said Uncle James, "he will stay with us. You can find a room for him, can you not, Maria?"

"Certainly, dear," said Aunt Maria, showing no surprise, though the fact that he had wantonly destroyed an umbrella scarcely seemed a reason for paying a prolonged visit to its owner. "He can have the little blue room. I'll tell Ann to get it ready."

"There is no hurry," said Uncle James grimly; "the rest of the evening I intend him to spend in solitude in the cellar. Boys who behave as he has done need a severe lesson, and Clementina implores me to take drastic measures."

For a moment, only for a moment, Tommy looked up imploringly at Uncle James, only to see his doom irrevocably sealed in that large, impassive face. Then he set his teeth hard and made up his mind to go through with it, though his heart sank lower even than it had been before. For, though he would have died rather than admit it, Tommy had a rooted dislike to being alone in the dark, even to going into dark rooms without a light. And if, dear sir or madam, you feel on that account tempted to

think meanly of him, let me implore you not to, because there is really no occasion to do so. It is a mere matter of nerves.

And Uncle James, who paused and glanced severely at his nephew as he delivered sentence, and perceived that he had produced an impression, felt rather pleased with himself as having hit upon an effective remedy. Poor Uncle James, he had no idea whatever that, on the whole, it would have been a more merciful proceeding if he had taken his umbrella and gouged one of Tommy's eyes out with the ferule.

Aunt Maria, on the other hand, had some faint, incoherent idea that this was rather a severe visitation for a small boy like Tommy. And so far I think her guilt is greater. She coughed apologetically, as one venturing on a bold and hazardous statement. "Don't you think, dear," she said nervously, "that the cellar is perhaps just a little *damp*?"

"No," said Uncle James, still keeping his eyes on Tommy, and still (God forgive him!) feeling pleased with himself. "No, certainly not. Please get me a candle. Thomas, come with me." He stalked solemnly down the hall and Tommy followed obediently behind. At a door under the stairs he paused and waited

until Aunt Maria joined them with a lighted candle. Then he unlocked the door, and inside appeared the top of a flight of stairs leading down into the black depths below. A breath of dank, chilly air came up from the cellar and suggested to Tommy's heated imagination first the thought of graves and dead people and then the thought of Attwood. It was too much for him. Without a moment's hesitation he turned and bolted again. This time Uncle James caught him before he could get even to the foot of the stairs, but instead of coming quietly, Tommy struggled and fought as though for dear life, lashing out vigorously at Uncle James' shins, and, as he still had his school boots on, doing considerable damage. Aunt Maria hovered about on the outskirts of the conflict, wringing her hands and uttering incoherent lamentations. The candle was projected half way up the stairs and made a nasty spot of grease on the carpet.

"Call Benjamin quick," gasped Uncle James, speaking with difficulty, for Tommy, whose legs were now out of action, was butting him vigorously in the stomach with his head. Aunt Maria obediently scuttled off, and almost immediately an elderly serving man appeared, hastily pulling on his coat.

He was so astonished at the spectacle of his usually dignified master struggling to protect himself from the attacks of an undutiful nephew that he stood staring with his mouth open, and making no attempt to come to the rescue.

“Catch hold of him, you fool!” shouted Uncle James, shaken out of his usual state of calm decorum by Tommy’s vigorous butting. “Can’t you see what he’s doing?” Thus reminded of his duties, Benjamin seized hold of Tommy from behind, and without more ado lifted him bodily off the floor and held him in such a manner that the only means of retaliation was to thump his captor on the back with one arm. That he did and with vigor, but it had no effect whatever. His captor, whose grip was a very different thing to that of Uncle James, stood perfectly still, waiting respectfully for further orders.

Uncle James was by this time terribly angry. He had been made to look extremely foolish (the most dignified person in the world can hardly help looking foolish when butted in the stomach) before Aunt Maria and Benjamin, and he was determined at all costs to bring Tommy to his senses. So when he saw that Benjamin had him securely in hold, he picked

up the candlestick again, lighted the candle, and led the way to the cellar, beckoning to Benjamin to follow. Benjamin did his best, but Tommy, so to speak, contested every inch of the ground, and whenever he had a chance of hooking onto anything, did so. At one point he got so tight a clutch of one of the banisters that Uncle James had to return and unhook him.

At the top of the cellar stairs his struggles became so frantic that Benjamin hesitated and stopped short.

Aunt Maria, who had accompanied the procession at a safe distance, seized the opportunity for lodging an appeal for mercy. "James, dear," she said, "I think the poor child is frightened. Don't you think he might be put in the blue room instead?"

"Certainly not, Maria," said Uncle James, whose shins were smarting. "A perfect little *tiger*. Can't you manage him, Benjamin?"

"I think I'd best put him down, sir," said Benjamin, and suiting the action to the word, he deposited Tommy at the top of the cellar steps. Tommy promptly sat down, spread out his legs so as to get as much leverage as possible and groped about for something to hold on to.

"I'm *sure* he's frightened," said Aunt Maria, bursting into tears. "I really don't think you ought to, James."

"Don't be foolish, Maria," said Uncle James sharply. "I know precisely what I'm doing. Benjamin, get him on."

Benjamin got him on, in a slow and undignified way, it is true, by pushing him from behind so that he slowly bumped down the entire flight of steps to the no small detriment of his clothes. Still, he attained the desired result and got him on and arrived at length at the last step. Uncle James followed with the candle. Aunt Maria remained at the top wiping her eyes with a cambric pocket handkerchief.

The cellar was a very large one, and one end only was filled with coal. It was not quite dark when your eyes got used to it, for a certain amount of daylight filtered through the trap door leading up into the street, and now and then the footstep of a passer-by made a sudden clatter on the iron. When all three had eventually reached the bottom step Uncle James with the candle started off into the gloom.

"Bring him along, Benjamin," he said; "I'm going to put him in the wine cellar."

There was a repetition of the struggle which had so upset Aunt Maria, and once again Tommy found himself enveloped in Benjamin's muscular arms and vainly beating a tattoo on his back. Uncle James led the way into the darkest and most remote corner of the cellar, where the flickering light of the candle revealed the presence of a very solid-looking door. He selected a key from a large bunch and unlocked it. Inside was darkness of the inkiest blackness, the sort of darkness that makes you start back as though it were something solid. The wine cellar was quite empty, for Uncle James and Aunt Maria and all their household were total abstainers, and the candle, when held inside, revealed nothing but an arrangement of stone shelves, which looked like gigantic pigeon holes.

"Put him in there, Benjamin," said Uncle James in his deepest voice. "Perhaps that will bring him to his senses."

Benjamin was about to obey when Tommy surprised them both by suddenly uttering a loud scream of terror, as though some one had run a knife into him. "Oh, don't, don't," he screamed, getting his arms tight round Benjamin's neck and clinging to him for dear life. "Don't let him, please don't let him."

That ought to have opened Uncle James' eyes as to what he was doing, for he had seen enough of Tommy that very afternoon to know that he was not a coward, and could take his punishment like a man. But I'm afraid it must be admitted (down here in this cellar is the best place to do it) that Uncle James was in some matters no better than a fool, and just at this moment he was an angry fool to boot. My only excuse for him is that he had never had any children of his own, and that his shins had been really badly barked. So far from relenting was he that he felt rather pleased at having brought Tommy to his senses (as he thought), and told Benjamin to put him inside at once.

Benjamin hesitated. Long habits of obedience and a profound respect for his employer as an upright man and a prosperous chartered accountant struggled for the mastery with some elemental emotion in the region of his waistcoat pocket, and while he hesitated and let Tommy hang on, and noted that he was trembling all over, a protesting voice was heard from the direction of the stairs. "James, I *implore* you not to. I'm quite sure he's frightened," it said rather quaveringly. It was Aunt Maria. She had actually ventured down into the cellar.

The interruption had the most unfortunate effect upon Uncle James, adding the last touch to his state of exasperation. He turned round quickly in the direction of the voice. "Go back, Maria," he bawled in a most ungentlemanly way. "How *dare* you interfere. Go away at once." And Aunt Maria, weeping salt tears into the cambric pocket handkerchief, went away. I don't blame her so much; she had done her best, poor thing.

No, Benjamin is the man I want to kick, and all right thinking people will want to do so, too. When Aunt Maria had gone away, Uncle James turned to him and ordered him to hand Tommy over. "*Don't let him, oh, don't let him,*" screamed Tommy, but Benjamin did. He pulled away the arms that were clinging to him so tightly and handed him over, for Uncle James' outburst of temper had been too much for the chicken-hearted Benjamin. We have seen in the course of this story, among other undesirable characters, a cad (the boy who listened at the keyhole), a humbug (I need not mention his name), at least one fool, and one simpleton. Now, in Benjamin you see before you a full-blown coward.

Uncle James had deposited the candle on the floor, so had both hands free to deal with

Tommy. He seized hold of him quite dexterously and thrust him through the door into the blackness. He did it so smartly that Tommy had only just time to get his foot in and prevent the door closing altogether.

"Please, Uncle, I'll never do it again, and I'll say I'm sorry, and I'll do anything," he gasped imploringly through the narrow opening.

"You'd better think of what you've done already," answered Uncle James in his remorseless bass. "Think of the Fifth Commandment, and where wicked boys go who break it." And with that he pushed Tommy's foot away and banged the door.

Shrieks for mercy and vigorous kicks at the woodwork followed at once, but deadened by the thickness of the door. Uncle James took no notice, but picked up the candlestick and stalked out, followed by his miserable servant. He was in a towering passion, and let the fact be known directly he arrived in the upper regions. He dared Aunt Maria (an easy task) to go near the cellar or allow any one else to go near it. He declared his intention of commencing investigations with a view to discovering who was master in *that* house, and then, with the keys of both cellars in his pocket and

his top hat slightly tilted on one side, he stalked out into the street, banging the front door behind him, and leaving Tommy in the darkness, and scared out of his wits, to meditate on the Fifth Commandment.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT TOMMY SAW IN THE CELLAR

THE reason why Tommy gave that sudden and blood-curdling scream was because, when Uncle James held the light up at the door of the wine cellar, he saw Attwood inside quite distinctly. He was sitting hunched up in one of the big stone pigeon holes looking just as he had the night before, but quite dead. And he was going to be locked up with that in the dark. You see now why I said that it would have been kinder in Uncle James if he had poked Tommy's eyes out with his umbrella.

But Uncle James of course had no idea what he was doing. A wine cellar was just a wine cellar to him, and darkness nothing more sensational than the absence of light. He went off in a very unpleasant temper to his club and played two games of billiards. I am glad to be able to say that he played them very badly and had in both cases to pay for the table.

But Tommy, as you will easily understand, was in a dreadful plight, and those last words about the Fifth Commandment put the finishing touch to his terror and panic. For Uncle

James, as for all Protestants, the Fifth Commandment meant the injunction to honor our fathers and mothers that our days may be long in the land, and he did not know that for a good Catholic like our poor Tommy it was the awful ordinance, "Thou shalt not kill." He had been puzzled the first time Uncle James referred to it, and had concluded that his objectionable relative did not know his catechism very well, but now the meaning of it suddenly flashed upon him. Somehow or other Uncle James had found out about Attwood, and Attwood was dead, and that was why he was being sent away from home, and that was why he had thought about him directly the cellar door was opened, and why he had seen him hunched up there in the darkness behind him. He battered and kicked more frantically than ever at the door, calling Uncle James all the bad names he could think of in a paroxysm of anger and fury. But the anger died away, or rather was overcome by a growing, overwhelming sense of terror, a cold fear that came creeping over him, as numbing and paralyzing as though he were being let down slowly by inches into icy cold water. Attwood, the dead Attwood, was in there with him—he was close behind him—his cold mouth was close to the nape of his neck

and blowing down it. And then he gave a shriek such as animals give when they are caught in a trap—a shriek of sheer, blind agony. And with that we must leave Tommy for the present, hoping that some one up above may hear him and have the sense to force the door and go down and do something.

For the adventures of William on this eventful afternoon, though less sensational than those of Tommy, are almost as important for our story, and we must go back to him for a little while. After they parted at the door of the church, William did not go straight home, but went round to Attwood's house and hung about outside very much as Tommy had done earlier in the day. As before, there was absolutely no sign of what was going on within, and no one went in or came out the whole time. He got tired of it at last and went home to tea, his whole soul possessed by the longing for half-past six to come.

Mrs. May was out, and his eldest sister (Miss Aggie's great friend), who was in temporary command, showed her sympathy by giving him two extra lumps of sugar in his tea. Matthew, who superintended the loaf, gave him the crust twice, though ordinarily the rule was that you took it in turns. Susannah kept on passing him

things, and James Arthur gave him two toffee drops wrapped up in a piece of paper, pushing them silently into his hand. But no one mentioned the subject of his trouble, though needless to say it was uppermost in every one's mind, and they would have dearly liked a circumstantial account. The eldest Miss May had that very afternoon had a little tiff on the matter with her friend next door, for Miss Aggie had (with perhaps a little want of tact), while expressing sympathy with the May family, added that she was most fervently thankful that Aleck had had nothing to do with it, at which Miss May (who had a temper like most of her brothers and sisters) fired up hotly in defense of William, and said that at any rate he had given himself up to justice, and even suggested that it is better not to be too sure about things of which you are not absolutely certain. Miss May to some extent shared in Susannah's antipathy for Alexander. But in spite of their curiosity they asked no questions, seeing clearly that William was in a state in which very little would upset him. And when he got up and said he must be going they let him go. Only their eldest sister followed him outside into the hall, and he told her what he was going for.

He arrived at the college soon after six and wandered about disconsolately for a time among the bare, empty corridors and class rooms. Waiting for important news is bad enough at all times, but to wait for it in an empty house, still more in an empty college, is enough to upset any one. William at ordinary times was by no means a nervous subject, but after about ten minutes of this sort of waiting he had worked himself into a regular fever, and kept on imagining he heard footsteps and that the messenger with the fatal tidings was coming. He did really hear some one at last, but it was Father Genicot going to his office. He told William that he had sent Henry the porter out to get the news, and that he would probably be back in a few minutes now, and he took him into his office and did his best to cheer him up. He was still at this kindly task when through the window they both saw Henry pass in the street outside. William's heart first stood still and then began to beat nineteen to the dozen.

"You just wait here a minute, Willy," said Father Genicot, and went out. William sat still in a cold perspiration, and looked dumbly up at the big crucifix which hung over the fireplace; it looked just then different to any cruci-

fix he had ever seen. There seemed to be nothing in the room but himself and the crucifix, and he made in those few moments the very best prayer he had ever made in his life, though he did not even know that he had been praying at all.

The door opened, and he sprang to his feet. One glance at Father Genicot's face was enough. "Thank God, it's all right, Willy," he said, but it was hardly necessary. William took a step or two unsteadily toward him. "It was Him," he said, pointing to the crucifix and hardly knowing what he said. You read in the lives of the saints of crucifixes that talk, but sometimes they talk to people who are not saints at all, and without any question of miracle.

Father Genicot, being such a wise man, knew that quite well. "Of course it was," he said. "Let's kneel down and thank Him, Willy," and they knelt down together on the hearth rug. They did not say anything out loud, but they both looked up at the crucifix without moving. Then Father Genicot made the sign of the cross and looked at William. "Finished?" said Father Genicot, and William shook his head. "I shan't never be finished," he said, "'cos it was Him."

Father Genicot rose to his feet and took a small pinch of snuff, and blew his nose violently with an immense orange-colored pocket handkerchief.

"Please, Father, I must go and tell Tommy," said William, still speaking in the same solemn, subdued tone, "'cos I promised." Father Genicot nodded, and William went out without another word.

When he had gone Father Genicot took up the letter he had just received and re-read it. It was written obviously in a great hurry, and was from Attwood's father. It said that the result of the examination was highly satisfactory, that the symptoms were not so serious as had been at first supposed, that there was no permanent injury, and no cause for anxiety whatever. "Well! well! well!" said Father Genicot to himself. "It's a queer world, surely." Then he settled himself down to say his office, and while he was saying it one text struck him so forcibly that he made his meditation on it next morning. It was a text on which he had often meditated before, and often did again. He used to call it the schoolmaster's text. I must leave you to guess what it was and why he thought of it just then.

As for William, directly he got outside he

began to run as hard as he could tear, and kept it up nearly all the way to Begonia Road, which was a goodish distance. Consequently, when he arrived at Laburnam Villa he was considerably out of breath, an unfortunate fact in view of the delicate negotiations upon which, though he did not know it, he was about to embark.

Mrs. Golightly came to the door in response to his summons, and as she had on her best Sunday dress, which looked at first sight to the uninitiated as though it were made of plum-colored silk, he thought it might be Tommy's mother, and politely raised his cap. "Please, can I see Tommy Browne?" he said directly the door was opened.

Mrs. Golightly did not answer for a moment. Though still smarting from the recent conflict, and inclined to include all boys in one universal condemnation, William's polite salute exercised a distinctly softening influence. Instead of answering with a curt negative and banging the door to, as she would probably otherwise have done, she sighed reflectively. "Master Thomas," she said, "is not at home, nor won't be."

William was so surprised that for a moment he could think of nothing to say. "He told me

he was goin' straight home," he gasped at length.

"That's as it may be," said Mrs. Golightly enigmatically.

"Don't you know where he's gone to?" asked William, racking his brains to think what could have happened.

"Maybe I do, maybe I don't," said Mrs. Golightly. "He's not gone; he's been took."

"Oh!" said William, more mystified than ever. From the mournful way she spoke she might have been announcing Tommy's premature decease.

"His uncle took him," continued Mrs. Golightly with growing severity, "and a good ride, too, that's what I say."

William began to suspect now what had happened, and saw that he must proceed cautiously and at all costs secure Tommy's present address. "Please, ma'am," he said, "I've got a message for him; won't you tell me where he is?"

It was the diplomatic "ma'am" that did it. Mrs. Golightly hesitated for a moment before answering, and looked at William's anxious face. "56 Pulteney Street," she said suddenly. "So now you know." She said it with such a tone of finality that William felt

that the conversation was ended. He thanked her and walked slowly down the path into Begonia Road, repeating over and over again, "56 Pulteney Street," for fear he should forget it. When he got clear of Laburnam Villa he wrote it down on a piece of paper.

He had no idea where Pulteney Street was, and went up and asked the first policeman he met, and learned that Pulteney Street was at the other side of the town, near Pounderly Park. It was a decidedly awkward situation. In less than an hour night studies would begin, and it would never do to cut them without leave after the kindness with which he had been treated at home; on the other hand it seemed awful to leave Tommy in suspense, still thinking that there might be some danger of Attwood's dying. To get to Pulteney Street he would have practically to pass his own home, and he made up his mind to go in and consult his eldest sister as to the course to be pursued in these perplexing circumstances. If she would take on herself the responsibility of his staying away from night studies there would be no danger.

However, when at last he arrived home and laid the matter before her, he found that, as often happens with people who are not accus-

tomed to high command, she was inclined to be nervous, and thought that he ought not to stay away on any account. She suggested that some one should be sent with a letter, and made William sit down and write one on the spot. So far all was easy enough. The letter did not give him much trouble, for by underlining it a good deal he made it perfectly clear that Attwood was out of danger, and that there was no further reason to be anxious. But when it came to deciding who was to take it, there seemed to be no one to send. Matthew was out, and so was the second eldest Miss May. The servants could not be spared, and Miss May of course could not relinquish her command. There was absolutely no one left but Susannah, and Miss May did not think that it would be quite the thing to send *her*. William suggested that she knew Tommy, and that she need only just leave the letter and come home at once, and that she often went to school by herself and could be quite trusted, but still Miss May did not think that it would be quite the thing. However, while the discussion was still in progress Susannah herself opportunely entered the room, and when she heard of the proposed commission, was so eager to undertake it and backed up William with so many

ingenious arguments that the head of the house at last reluctantly gave way, and Susannah hastened upstairs to put on her things. Armed with twopence for her tram and many injunctions as to being careful of the crossings, she was at last allowed to depart, and William, with an easy mind, started off to the college for night studies. As nothing particular happened at these night studies, while a good many things happened to Susannah, we will for once abandon the society of the Black Brothers and follow the fortunes of one of their sisters.

CHAPTER XIX

SUSANNAH BORROWS TWOPENCE

SUSANNAH was fully conscious of the importance of her mission, and her heart was beating a good deal more quickly than usual, though from the dignified way in which she paid the tram conductor no one would have guessed it. Miss May had told her that she was on no account to go in, but she had secretly promised William to give the letter into Tommy's own hands.

During the journey she was turning over in her mind possible plans of action, and rehearsing the scene that would follow when, in answer to her ring, the front door of 56 Pulteney Street would fly open. A housemaid would, of course, appear, and she would ask to see Master Browne. "Tommy Browne" would be too familiar, and "Mr. Browne" might call forth Tommy's uncle. The housemaid would then say: "Will you step inside, miss?" and she would reply (following the best models), "Thank you, no. I have an important engagement." So far the etiquette was plain enough, but what should she do when Tommy

himself appeared, especially if he pressed her to come in, as she felt sure he would, having no sisters? Susannah had not forgotten the episode in the garden, and though she had not probably thought as much about it as Tommy, she did not want to appear stand-offish nor yet to disguise too much the fact that she liked Tommy very much, and thought him the nicest and bravest boy of her acquaintance after William. On the other hand, it was perfectly certain that she mustn't go in. Perhaps a short conversation on the doorstep would meet all requirements, and perhaps the best plan would be to explain to Tommy exactly how matters stood. She had not quite made up her mind when the tram stopped at the gates of Ponderly Park, and five minutes after that, following the directions of the tram conductor, she found herself in Pulteney Street.

The magnificence of the houses rather took her aback. They were all much bigger than in Roscommon Street, and a great many of them were decorated with imposing brass plates. As she drew near No. 56 she began to feel more and more nervous, and at the foot of the flight of steps leading to that mansion she paused and repeated two or three times, "Is Master Browne at home?" "Thank you, no. I have

an important engagement," and drew William's letter out of her pocket. Then she boldly advanced and (with difficulty, for it was rather high up) rang the bell and waited.

She had to wait rather a long time, and was indeed beginning to fear that she had not been heard, and to wonder whether the proper thing was to ring again, when suddenly the door opened. It *was* a housemaid, not a footman, as the magnificence of the houses had led her to fear, and she got out the first part of her formula quite successfully. The housemaid did not take the cue at once; she stood, without speaking, looking curiously at Susannah, and Susannah repeated her question. Still the housemaid (who seemed a rather stupid person) failed to make the obvious rejoinder, and Susannah began to feel uneasy and to wonder if she hadn't come to the wrong house. "Isn't he here, please?" she said, and the housemaid said, "Yes, miss."

"I want to give him this letter, please," said Susannah, with a vague sort of feeling that something was wrong. "Will you ask him to come here for a minute?" Again the housemaid looked at her in a curious way without speaking, and then, to her intense astonishment, she drew out a pocket handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

"Will you please to step inside, miss," she said, but Susannah was so upset that she forgot her carefully prepared reply. "Is anything the matter with him?" she asked anxiously. "I want to give him this letter."

The housemaid shook her head mournfully. "It's very important, please. Do ask him to come down," said Susannah. The words seemed to increase the housemaid's distress, and she sobbed audibly. Susannah, more mystified than ever, and feeling that something dreadful must have happened to Tommy, stood and gazed at her in silence. The housemaid continued to weep.

"They've g-gone and l-locked him up in the cellar," she sobbed at last, "and he's been screaming something dreadful (loud sob) and they won't let us go down" (several loud sobs). Susannah's first feeling on hearing this was not sympathy, but scorn. She felt that William would not have screamed if they had locked *him* up in a cellar. Then she remembered how brave Tommy was, and felt sorry for him. No doubt there was something particularly horrible in the cellar. She held out the letter and said again, "It's very important. The housemaid took it and gazed at it tearfully, but made no movement in any direction. She was still

gazing at it when a third party appeared on the scene, a stoutish lady with a very flushed face. This was Mrs. Gollop, the housekeeper, and she was fresh from an interview with Aunt Maria, in the course of which she had expressed her opinion on the situation pretty clearly.

She looked inquiringly at Susannah and at the housemaid. "This young lady wants to see Master Tommy," said the latter by way of explanation.

"Well, suppose she does," said Mrs. Gollop severely. "That's no reason for carrying on in that way that *I* can see. Go back to the kitchen at once, Sarah. I'm ashamed of you, really I am." Sarah at once retired.

"You must learn to control your feelings, Sarah," added Mrs. Gollop as a parting shot at the retreating figure, "and not to give way to every emotion. Now, my dear, you just listen to me," she continued, turning to Susannah.

"Please, I want to give this letter to Tommy Browne, and it's very—" Susannah was beginning, when Mrs. Gollop cut her short.

"Never you mind the letter," she said, taking it, all the same, and putting it into her pocket. Master Tommy's locked up in a cupboard in

the cellar, and the master's gone out with the keys, so there's no more to be said about *that*. What you've got to do, my dear, is to go straight off to his mar and tell her if she don't want him frightened into an idiot she'd better come here at once. Tell her Mrs. Gollop said so."

This unexpected and sensational announcement took Susannah so much by surprise that she simply stared at Mrs. Gollop with wide open eyes and made no reply.

"Now, it's no good staring at me like that," said Mrs. Gollop. "I mean what I say, and I know what I'm talking about. It's not for nothing I've brought up a family. You just do what I say, like a good little gel."

Susannah was too taken aback to resent even this unbecoming form of address. "But I don't know where he lives," she gasped.

"Laburnum Villa's the house, and Begonia Road's the road," said Mrs. Gollop. "Take the tram at Pounderly Park and change at Prestatyn Street. His mar's as nice a lady as ever you saw, so don't you be afraid. Now off you go, and the quicker the better." So powerful was the masterful decision of Mrs. Gollop that Susannah actually turned and proceeded to descend the steps.

"*What's* the name of the house?" Mrs. Gollop called after her, and Susannah, turning, found that she had forgotten.

"Oh, silly, silly, silly!" cried Mrs. Gollop, "come here, do." Susannah obediently returned, but instead of repeating her instructions Mrs. Gollop seized her by the shoulder and marched her through the hall. At the door under the stairs, the scene of Tommy's desperate fight for freedom, she paused. "Put your ear to that keyhole," she said, and Susannah put her ear to the keyhole and then looked up at Mrs. Gollop and began to cry.

"No, no," said Mrs. Gollop, down whose face, in spite of her condemnation of Sarah, two tears were trickling, "no, no, my dear, that'll never do. You must be off and get his mar. *She's* the only one that can do anything."

Susannah dried her eyes with a clean pocket handkerchief, and suddenly remembered that she ought not to have come inside. She made for the door at once, Mrs. Gollop following. On the way Mrs. Gollop took a card from the tray in the hall and scribbled Mrs. Clementina's address upon it and gave it to Susannah, who pocketed it in a most business-like manner. "It's a *horrid* shame," she said tearfully, and Mrs. Gollop nodded approval. Then they

parted, Mrs. Gollop watching her from the doorstep until she turned the corner.

From what has just passed it will be easy to see that ever since Uncle James' departure civil war had been raging in No. 56. Aunt Maria had not been the only spectator of Tommy's sufferings, and Benjamin had a warm reception when he returned to the upper regions, so warm, indeed, that the cook, with whom he had hitherto been on the most friendly terms, had gone so far as to smack his face. I do not pretend to regret it, though perhaps the exploit is rather to be admired than imitated. Mrs. Gollop's contribution had been, as I have stated, to give Aunt Maria a piece of her mind; she was a privileged person in Uncle James' household. As for Susannah, it was only when she found herself in the tram again and speeding toward Roscommon Street that the full gravity of the situation dawned upon her. She had made herself more or less responsible for effecting Tommy's release through the medium of his mother; that is to say, she, who had only been allowed, under the extremest pressure, to go out to leave a letter, with strict injunctions to return at once, had bound herself to go to the other end of the town, call on a total stranger and inform her that Tommy was being

frightened out of his wits. As to the fact she had no doubt. The sounds from the cellar had been so gruesome that every time she thought of them she wanted to cry again, and she kept on saying to herself, "Poor Tommy; oh, poor, poor Tommy!" But owing to her generosity of the day before, the only money she possessed was the penny that remained out of the twopence given her for this journey, and that was speedily called for by the conductor. There was nothing for it but to go home and lay the facts of the case before the sister in command. Susannah sighed deeply as she realized the struggle that lay before her, and a stout lady sitting opposite her wondered what was troubling the little girl on the other side. If only her mother would come home, or Willie, or even Matt, but it was ordained that Susannah should bear this burden all alone.

And after she had alighted from the tram another aspect of the question arose and made the situation yet more complicated. *She* knew that Tommy was not a coward, but, on the contrary, a singularly brave, chivalrous and heroic person. She knew, too, that something very horrible was happening to him in the cellar, rats, perhaps, and that if he was screaming out it was because he could not help it. But if she

told her sister, or even her mother, still more Matt or William, about it, they would certainly despise Tommy and think him a silly baby. Before she had got to the end of Roscommon Street she had made up her mind that no one should ever hear about that screaming from her. By the time she had reached No. 5 she had formed a resolution so daring and desperate that it only becomes credible when you remember that she was the daughter of Captain May, and inherited along with her brothers and sisters a full share of his stoutness of heart. She would go to Mrs. Clementina all by herself, without saying anything to anybody, and demand Tommy's instant release. Tommy's honor, I am thinking, could hardly have been intrusted to more loyal keeping.

The first and greatest difficulty to be overcome was the question of money. Susannah was now penniless, and except by following Mrs. Gollop's instructions to the letter and taking a tram, she did not know how to get to Begonia Road. Twopence would probably be enough, but the raising of twopence is sometimes a tremendous matter, and at the moment of ringing the front door bell she did not see her way to it at all.

The moment the front door was opened Miss

May came bustling out, greatly relieved to find that no accident had happened. She had spent the interval of Susannah's absence in contemplating a series of possible calamities ranging from damaged garments to broken limbs. "Now run upstairs at once, like a good girl," she said, "and take off your things and come down and begin your lessons. You'll be dreadfully behindhand as it is, and I'm sure I don't know what Sister Elizabeth will say to-morrow." Susannah proceeded obediently to mount the stairs without answering. "Did you leave the letter?" Miss May called after her, and Susannah intimated that she had.

Now that she was indoors again the enterprise she had undertaken seemed more desperate and dangerous than ever, but she never wavered for a moment. Her whole mind was bent on the solution of the pecuniary problem, and half way up the stairs a possibility presented itself in the person of James Arthur, who was descending with slow and deliberate steps, a large copy book tucked carefully under one arm.

Susannah impulsively threw one arm round his neck and sat down on the stairs beside him. "Jimmy, dear, lend me twopence, there's a

darling," she said, and Jimmy stopped and looked at her gravely.

"What for?" he asked cautiously.

"'Cos I want it *dreadfully* badly," said Susannah. "Do, Jimmy, there's a dear," she said coaxingly. "Willy would," she added, knowing the weight which William's authority possessed with his small brother.

"No, he wouldn't," answered Jimmy (possibly with truth), "not if you didn't tell him what for."

"Yes, he would," said Susannah, "and I'll ask him to take you out with him next Saturday if you will, and I'll pay it back. Jimmy shook his head obstinately. "What's it for?" he said again—and at the same moment the dining-room door opened.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, what on earth *are* you doing?" came in tones of exasperation from below, and Jimmy shouted in return, "I'm jus' comin'," and recommenced his descent.

"Oh, Jimmy, don't be horrid," said Susannah in an agitated whisper. "It is 'cos I'm goin' out without telling Conny for something for Willie."

"Willie's at school," said James Arthur incredulously, continuing his descent. Susannah burst into tears. The sight of this heaven-sent

opportunity disappearing was too much for her.

It was the wisest thing she could have done, for James Arthur, though taught by experience to be prudent in business transactions, especially with elder brothers and sisters, was none the less a gentleman and not inclined to carry things too far. He drew two rather sticky pennies from his pocket.

"Here y'are," he said magnanimously. "You needn't tell me nuffin'."

Susannah accepted them gratefully. "Don't tell Conny," she said, and Jimmy answered, "Raver not," and winked cheerfully. "You'll catch it when muvver comes home," he said, and then he continued his journey more expeditiously, for the dining-room door was heard again to open. Susannah, leaning over the banisters, caught a glimpse of him being unceremoniously shaken and hustled inside.

She waited for the door to close again, and then darted upstairs to the room she shared with her third eldest sister. Without a moment's hesitation she pulled a chair up to the wardrobe, mounted on it and drew out her Sunday hat. Then she hurried across to the chest of drawers and from her own particular drawer, the receptacle of all her treasures (in-

cluding the now empty money-box) she brought forth, first a pair of neatly folded gloves, secondly an embroidered pocket handkerchief, and thirdly a rather large card with "Miss Susannah May" written on the upper part, and "At Home" occupying the lower. This was a relic of her last birthday party; six copies had been written out for her by one of her sisters, who was noted for her beautiful writing, five had been distributed among her friends and the sixth retained for future use. The "at home" had puzzled Susannah a good deal, but as every one seemed to take it for granted that it was the proper thing, she had not liked to ask any questions, and after much reflection had come to the conclusion that probalby really fashionable people sometimes changed their names when they went abroad, and so found it necessary to make the distinction. Every one knows that when you call on strangers you ought to have your card case with you, and it was not likely that a careful student of propriety like Susannah would omit so important a detail. This was the nearest approach to a visiting card she could raise under the circumstances, and she carefully folded it up in the embroidered pocket handkerchief. Her preparations being now complete, she stole

as noiselessly as she could downstairs, out into the garden, and then into the back street. She met no one on the way, and once outside the garden door, she threw dignity to the winds and ran. It was not until she had reached Prestatyn Street and was seated in the tram indicated by Mrs. Gollop that she felt she was perfectly safe.

CHAPTER XX

SUSANNAH MAKES A CALL

M^{RS.} CLEMENTINA BROWNE was sitting in her studio trying with the aid of a small sponge and a bottle of benzine to get out the spots with which the Patent Imperial Squelch-it-out had besprinkled her dress. She was still in very low spirits and rather out of temper, and when Mrs. Golightly knocked modestly at the door and entered she gave her anything but a smiling reception. Mrs. Golightly was still clad in plum-colored silk and her face bore the nearest approach to a smile of which it was capable. "A little gel, mum," she said, "would like to see you. She gave me this," she added, with what in any one else I should have described as a giggle.

Mrs. Clementina shook her head without looking at the card. "One of these begging children, I suppose," she answered. "Tell her I've nothing to give," and she recommenced her spot-extinguishing operations.

"A nice little gel, mum," said Mrs. Golightly, who had a soft spot in her mournful heart for little girls. "And she said she wanted

to see you most particular, and she gave me this." She held out the card, which Mrs. Clementina took and glanced at. Her face relaxed a little. "What an odd little thing," she said. "Well, you may send her in, Mrs. Golightly, if you think she isn't begging." Mrs. Golightly retired and summoned Susannah, who was sitting on the very chair previously occupied by Uncle James, feverishly repeating the phrase she had selected as the most appropriate for commencing the interview. She rose at once, in answer to Mrs. Golightly's signal, and followed her into the studio.

Mrs. Clementina ought to have said, "To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" but instead of that she just sat still and stared, which was certainly not the proper thing to do. However, if you cannot get your cue you must do without it, and accordingly she looked straight at the formidable lady before her and said in a clear voice. "You will pardon, I trust, the intrusion of an entire stranger."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Clementina, rather taken aback; "won't you take a seat?" Susannah took a seat and looked anxiously at her hostess, who sat eyeing her critically. The magnificence and seeming haughtiness of Tommy's mother quite drove out of her head

all the other polite phrases she had thought upon the way. They were mostly culled from "Politeness Costs Nothing, a Handbook of Practical Etiquette," of which one of the elder Misses May possessed a copy.

"Well," said Mrs. Clementina at last, "what did you want to see me for? If you're begging I may as tell you at once that I never give anything to children on principle."

"I'm *not*," said Susannah, flushing indignantly and not altogether understanding the remark. "I wouldn't *do* such a thing, I'm sure. She wished she had put on her Sunday dress as well as the hat, and wondered if she looked very shabby.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mrs. Clementina. "Perhaps you'll tell me what you *have* come for, then, as I'm rather busy this evening."

Susannah was so angry at the suggestion that she was a beggar that she did not answer for a moment. "I came about—about—Tommy," she said at last. It did not seem quite the right title to use, but "Master Browne" seemed still more out of the question.

Mrs. Clementina frowned severely. "Do you mean my son *Thomas*?" she said.

Susannah blushed, feeling the rebuke keenly, and wondering how Mrs. Gollop could have

been so misguided as to describe this horrid person as "as nice a lady as ever you saw." "Yes, ma'am," she said meekly. "Please, Mrs. Gollop asked me to come."

Susannah had hoped that the name of Gollop might exercise a softening effect upon her hostess, but in this she was disappointed. "Oh, *did* she?" answered that lady. "Then you can tell Mrs. Gollop from me that I wonder she *dares* to interfere." Mrs. Clementina knew of Mrs. Gollop as the tyrant of Uncle James' household, and resented what she thought was probably a criticism of her methods.

Susannah began to be alarmed, for things seemed to be taking a bad turn. She lost her head a little and made a tactical mistake. "Please, she wants you to come and stop him being punished," she said, looking up entreatingly at her hostess.

Mrs. Clementina flushed angrily. "Does she?" she answered; "the very idea! And she sent *you*, did she? Well, I wonder what next! Why, I *sent* him to be punished. I'm sure I hope he *is* being punished—a wicked, undutiful little wretch."

"He's *not*," almost shouted Susannah, rising from her chair and confronting her hostess. "He's a *good* boy; I know he is, and they're

frightening him into an idiot. Mrs. Gollop said they were, and it's just horrid of you to call him names." She was quite surprised at her own boldness.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Clementina, "so *you're* a friend, too, are you? I didn't know Thomas *had* any lady friends."

"Yes, I am," said Susannah stoutly. "We've been introjooiced quite properly; my brother introjooiced us, and he got my money box back for me, and he's a very brave boy, and he wouldn't scream out for ordinary things, 'cos he told me.

"Oh, *please* do come," she continued, as Mrs. Clementina made no answer, being, as a matter of fact, rather taken aback by this flood of revelation. "He's locked up in a horrid, awful cellar, and Mrs. Gollop *said* you'd come." She went close up to Mrs. Clementina and caught hold of her impulsively.

"Don't pull my dress about," said Mrs. Clementina sharply. "And you mustn't talk to me like that or I shall be very angry." Susannah's lips began to tremble at this rebuke and her hostess softened a little. "I dare say you're a very kind-hearted little girl," she continued, "but when boys misbehave they have to be punished, and I must say I am surprised at

your mother allowing you to come on such an errand."

"She didn't," said Susannah. "I came by myself."

"Then I think you'd better go back at once, and I expect you'll get a good scolding," said Mrs. Clementina. "If you were *my* little girl I should be very angry indeed."

"But you will go, please, won't you?" said Susannah, disregarding the personalities and sticking to the point. "Oh, please do; you don't know how dreadfully it sounded."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Clementina, with energy. "It's the most preposterous idea I ever heard of in my life. I'm sure Thomas deserves all that he's getting, and more into the bargain."

Susannah recoiled in horror, and forgot even her strong sense of propriety at the spectacle of such stoney-heartedness. "Oh, you *horrid* thing!" she exclaimed indignantly, "and Mrs. Gollop said you were nice. I'm glad I'm *not* your little girl."

"Go away," cried Mrs. Clementina, rising indignantly from her chair and ringing the bell violently. "Mrs. Golightly, show this young person out at once. I've a very good mind to

write to your mother and tell her how rude you've been, miss," she added.

Before this awful outburst Susannah's indignation subsided. She followed Mrs. Golightly submissively to the door, and then, with a sudden remembrance of the obligations of propriety, she turned and addressed her hostess. "I'm sorry I was rude," she said, "and I wish you a good afternoon." Mrs. Clementina made no reply, and Susannah, turning a deaf ear to Mrs. Golightly's well-meant but somewhat sepulchral jocularities, allowed herself to be conducted off the premises. She was too proud to break down while in the enemy's citadel, but directly she got into Begonia Road she began to cry, and cried and cried, leaning desolately against the railings of Mr. Appleby's garden, and bedewing his geraniums plentifully with her tears. For it was simply heartbreaking to think that, in spite of all her efforts, all her daring and audacity had been in vain, and that Tommy must remain in the dreadful cellar until his wicked uncle chose to let him out. "Oh, *poor Tommy*," she sobbed, "*poor dear Tommy*." She cried so violently that a kind-hearted lady stopped and wanted to know the cause, and pressed her so hard that Susannah said at last that she had toothache, and the

kind-hearted lady recommended menthol. This added another woe to Susannah's heavy burden, for she suffered dreadfully from remorse of conscience at the thought of having told a story, and found it hard to keep up appearances during the tram ride home.

Directly she rang the bell of No. 5 Roscommon Street the door flew open and the agitated and indignant figure of Miss May appeared in the opening. She seized Susannah unceremoniously and bundled her into the hall. Then she took her by both shoulders and shook her violently and demanded to know where she had been and how she *dared*, yes, *dared*, to go out without her leave, and what she thought her mother would say. To all of which Susannah returned a stony silence, and was, after some more questioning, sent off to bed with dreadful threats of what she might expect would happen later. Maintaining outwardly a more or less calm demeanor (but only just), she climbed miserably upstairs, leaving her indignant sister to return to the dining-room and prepare her indictment.

As she passed the nursery, which was inhabited by James Arthur and the youngest of all, she heard her name called in a cheerful but cautious whisper (the door being ajar), and

on entering found James Arthur sitting up in bed in his night shirt chewing gum in the dark. "Mind the baby," he whispered, and Susannah carefully shaded the candle with one hand and came over to him on tiptoe. James Arthur had been sent to bed in disgrace, under suspicion of being an accessory before the fact to Susannah's crime, as he now proceeded to explain, with a cautious eye all the time upon the placidly slumbering baby. To wake the baby was an offense which always brought summary vengeance in its train.

Susannah put the candle carefully on the floor, took off her hat, and sitting down on the bed, buried her face in the pillow and burst into tears. She wanted sympathy, and James Arthur was the only point available.

She might have gone to worse sources. Though rather surprised at first and anxious about the baby, he soon understood what was expected of him, and patted her head with an affectionate, if sticky, hand. "Did she smack you?" he asked kindly. "I didn't split, really I didn't." Susannah shook her head impatiently.

"You needn't tell me nuffin' if you don't like," murmured James Arthur magnanimously, and reached out for his coat, the pocket

of which contained a further supply of chewing-gum.

"Oh, Jimmy, dear, I am so miserable," sobbed Susannah. "I'd tell you all about it if I could."

"I wouldn't split," said James Arthur earnestly, "*honestinjun*."

"I *know* you wouldn't, Jimmy, darlin'," sobbed Susannah, "but it's a secret and I c-can't." She buried her face on the pillow and sobbed aloud.

James Arthur felt that this was a grief too great for chewing-gum, and tucked the fresh supply under the pillow. "You needn't pay back that twopence, y'know," he said, adding at once, in answer to a sudden scruple, "unless you *want* to." Susannah sat up and give him an affectionate hug.

"You're a dear darlin'," she said; "'course I'll pay it back. You must go to sleep now and I mustn't stop." She rose from the bed, smoothed her hair and put on her hat again; and then she shook the pillow straight and tucked James Arthur up carefully. "Oh, Jimmy, dear, how *sticky* your hands are," she whispered, with a sudden return to the elder sister attitude.

"It's all ri'," murmured James Arthur sleep-

ily. "It comes off on the bedclothes." Susannah shook her head reprovably. "You'll be *just* like Willy when you grow up," she said, and James Arthur transferred a lump of chewing-gum to the other cheek and grinned appreciatively. To be like William was the object of his most cherished ambition.

Susannah gave him a parting kiss and stole noiselessly out of the room. But when she got to her own bedroom she began to cry again (I am afraid she will be thought rather a weepy young lady), and when she said her prayers she begged God most fervently to take care of Tommy, and make them let him out and to forgive her for telling stories. Then she tried to go to sleep, and succeeded after a time, thinking to the end of Tommy and believing that her mission had been a hopeless and heart-breaking failure.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLIMAX OF THE TRAGEDY

BUT it had not, by any means. As so often happens, what seemed at the moment an ignominious failure was in reality a very brilliant success. For in spite of the relentless attitude she had thought it necessary to adopt, her interview with Susannah left Mrs. Clementina very uneasy and anxious. The earnestness of her visitor, and, in particular, the remark about their frightening Tommy into an idiot, had impressed her very much, and the more she thought the matter over, the stronger the desire grew to go to Pulteney Street and see for herself that Uncle James was not pushing matters too far. The difficulty was to find a reasonable excuse, and with a view to discovering one, she went up to his bedroom to see if Mrs. Golithly had forgotten to pack up some indispensable article. She could find only a nail brush, which was hardly in itself sufficient, but she added two pairs of socks and a flannel shirt so as to have a decently big parcel. Armed with this, she sallied forth, without (as will be easily understood) telling her cook-house-

keeper of her destination, and at the very first cab-stand she came to she took a taxi and told the man to drive as quickly as he could to Pulteney Street. And this despite the fact that she hated taxis, not alone because they went at such a vertiginous pace, but because the sight of the constantly increasing liabilities always depressed her.

Once inside and whirling Uncle Jamesward she began to feel foolish and to wish she hadn't. The parcel beside her seemed now a somewhat disproportionate excuse for the outlay of capital involved, and there seemed, too, something rather incongruous in tearing at this breakneck speed across the city in order to supply a riotous and disobedient little boy with a nail brush, two pairs of socks and a flannel shirt. Even if she described the parcel as containing a "few things," Uncle James would scarcely fail to suspect some ulterior motive and hold her guilty of extravagance and maternal weakness. So strongly did she feel that she was committing herself in a particularly censorious quarter that she determined to stop the cab at the end of the street and walk up to the house. This plan was, however, frustrated by the fact that at the moment when it should have been carried out the register suddenly ran to two

shillings, which so startled Mrs. Clementina that she forgot all about her plan for the moment. When she came to herself again the brakes were already on and the cab slowing up before No. 56.

She got out and paid her fare, and at that very moment, as luck would have it, Uncle James, returning from his club, arrived at the door of his residence. He looked very surprised at seeing Mrs. Clementina, and glanced with marked disapproval at the now disappearing taxi. "What does *this* mean, Clementina?" he said severely. "You are *surely* not——"

"Oh, *dear* no, James, nothing of the *sort*, I assure you," said Mrs. Clementina energetically. "Just a few things Thomas left behind. I—I thought he might want them, you know."

"Humph!" said Uncle James (he was still in a very bad temper). "I will take them in for you, Clementina. You are probably in a hurry to get back."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Clementina, somewhat agitatedly. "That is, of course, *yes*. But I'll just come in for a moment and see Maria. How *is* Maria?"

"Maria, I am thankful to say," answered Uncle James, "is in tolerable health." The

tone of his voice made it quite clear that he was deeply offended, and Mrs. Clementina became still more agitated as she followed him up the steps and into that hall. The moment the front door was opened Mrs. Gollop appeared in the distance, but she vanished when she saw Uncle James.

Still maintaining his haughty and unbending demeanor, he ushered Mrs. Clementina into the drawing-room, where Aunt Maria was sitting in a very unhappy frame of mind. She started quickly when she saw who the visitor was, and tried to hide her embarrassment by the effusiveness of her welcome.

"Clementina," boomed Uncle James in his deepest voice, "has brought a few articles for Thomas. Perhaps you will see that he has them. They appear to be indispensable."

"Certainly, dear," gasped Aunt Maria nervously, "I'll give them to him at once—that is, presently, of course." Her obvious embarrassment, coupled with Uncle James' biting satire, upset Mrs. Clementina still further, and she quite lost her head. "His *nail-brush*, you know, Maria," she said hastily, "he left it behind. He has such trouble with his teeth, I mean with his nails. Oh, dear, I'm afraid I'm talking dreadful nonsense," she added, and

sank with a despairing gesture into the nearest chair.

"Clementina," said Uncle James solemnly, "I respect your maternal solicitude, but you must allow me to say that you are exhibiting very great and deplorable weakness."

"I'm afraid I *am*," answered Mrs. Clementina humbly, and then abandoning all attempt at concealment, she added, "but is he all right, James? I know it's *very* silly, but I felt so anxious."

Uncle James, if possible, grew even more portentously solemn. The idea that it was not all right, or could be otherwise than all right in any proceeding which *he* directed, had never once entered his respectable bald head. Let us make that quite clear once and for all. His ignorance was of the sort that moral theologians picturesquely call crass and supine. He felt it as an affront that even the suggestion should have been made, and he answered his visitor's agitated question in a tone of severe and somewhat oratorical reproof.

"Clementina," he said, standing before the fireplace with one hand under his coat tails, "it is not for *me* to judge of the methods you choose to adopt in the education of your son, of my poor brother's only son, but I fear I can

not congratulate you on their results. Thomas bears all the marks of being a thoroughly spoiled and vicious child."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Clementina in great distress. "Do you really think so?"

"I am convinced of it," said Uncle James. "I have noticed with pain, in the course of my recent visits to your house, a growing spirit of insolence and insubordination. The boy is by nature self-willed and obstinate. Your culpable weakness and total neglect in the correction of his faults has naturally tended to confirm him in them."

"But I *do*," said Mrs. Clementina. "Why, only this morning I asked Father Genicot to give him a good whipping. I did indeed."

Uncle James snorted contemptuously. "I have already made you fully aware of the opinion I entertain with regard to the collegiate establishment which you have selected for my nephew," he said severely.

"It was poor, dear Thomas' wish, you *know* it was, James," said Mrs. Clementina, wiping her eyes. "Poor darling, it was almost the last thing he ever said."

"My brother Thomas," answered Uncle James with some warmth, "would not, I fancy, have wished his son to develop into a youthful

hooligan with the instincts of a savage and the manners of a bargee." At these words both ladies looked at him with surprise, and Mrs. Clementina bridled indignantly.

"Really, James—" she was beginning, when he cut her short.

"I use the words deliberately, Clementina," he said with growing energy. "I need not pain you by recalling the shocking events of this afternoon, but let me tell you that your son's behavior while in my house has been, if possible, of an even more outrageous description. Maria, I think, will bear me out when I say that he exhibited a tigerish ferocity which I should have deemed impossible in one so young. He did not even scruple to resort, I am grieved to say it, to personal violence" (this was the most direct allusion to his damaged shins which modesty permitted). Aunt Maria, thus appealed to, shook her head dolefully in confirmation, and Mrs. Clementina's rebellious impulse subsided.

"I'm sure I don't know what's come over him lately," she said, wiping her eyes again. "He used to be such a dear, good little boy!"

"No, no, Clementina, believe me, he has been throwing dust into your eyes," said Uncle James. "No right-principled boy *could* have

behaved as he has done. The evil is so deeply rooted that only by the most drastic measures, firmly and consistently applied, can we hope to eradicate it. I have already commenced that application, with, I think, hopeful results. I flatter myself that, at the cost, it's true, of no little inconvenience, I have at least contrived to bring him to his senses."

"What have you done to him, James?" asked Mrs. Clementina nervously.

"I have followed the course recommended in parallel cases by the eminent philanthropist, Robert Howard," answered Uncle James, growing wordier and wordier, "a man for whom we have all, I suppose, the greatest veneration. In other words, I have placed him in solitary confinement, and intend that he shall remain there for the rest of the evening. And permit me to say that if you still desire to place the matter in my hands, I can not allow my arrangements to be interfered with."

"Is he in the dark?" asked Mrs. Clementina.

"He is," answered Uncle James. "It is an essential part of the system."

Mrs. Clementina was silent; all her former anxieties were aroused, and yet she was afraid to put in a plea for a mitigation of the sentence lest it should call down upon her another re-

buke. From this dilemma she was rescued by Aunt Maria, who gallantly stepped into the breach.

"Don't you think, James, dear," she said nervously, "that if he's *really* sorry, you might let him out. I *can't* help thinking the cellar may be a little damp."

"Oh, *do*, James," Mrs. Clementina chimed in. "I don't want to interfere, indeed I don't. I have the most implicit confidence in your judgment, as you know. I'm *sure* you're doing the best possible for poor Thomas—*quite* sure. But do go down and let him out, just to satisfy his poor silly old mother, James." In her eagerness she had risen and caught hold of his arm.

"I know it's weak," she continued, seeing that Uncle James showed no signs of relenting, "terribly, terribly weak. But he's all I've got, James; he's my only little Thomas." The handkerchief was again called into requisition.

"Calm yourself, Clementina, calm yourself, I beg," said Uncle James, who, as I have stated before, was really a kind-hearted man. "It is not in accordance with my original plan, but I have no objection, if it will be any satisfaction to you, to paying him a visit, or even to curtailing his punishment should he prove repent-

ant. I have no other motive than the child's reformation, I assure you."

"Oh, I *know* you haven't," cried Mrs. Clementina, "and I'm *most* grateful for all you've done, for all your kindness. But it would be such a relief to me if you'd go down, just to make quite sure that he's not too frightened. He sometimes is rather frightened in the dark."

"Certainly, Clementina," said Uncle James, ringing the bell. "I am anxious, believe me, to relieve you of all the pain I can." He ordered a candle to be brought, and when it arrived, lighted it and prepared to depart. "I think it will be wise not to inform him of your visit," he said as he opened the door, and Mrs. Clementina meekly acquiesced.

He walked down the hall as perfect a figure of self-satisfied propriety and self-conscious wisdom as could well be imagined, totally and pathetically ignorant of the fact that Nemesis, the Nemesis that punishes ignorance—and a truly appalling goddess she is—was stalking close behind him spitting on her hands gleefully (if we can suppose a goddess would do anything so vulgar), and preparing to deliver such a series of resounding cuffs as he would remember all the days of his life.

The ladies, when he left them, began to con-

verse on indifferent topics—the weather, Aunt Maria's sciatica, bargains in tegal hats to be had at a current sale, the ways of suffragettes (which Aunt Maria condemned and Mrs. Clementina mildly championed), and so on. The minutes drew on into a quarter of an hour, and Mrs. Clementina began to glance uneasily at the loud-ticking, early Victorian clock, but still no Uncle James appeared to relieve the tension. "I expect he's giving him a good talking to," said Aunt Maria at last, and Mrs. Clementina was understood to say that she thought it very probable. They recommenced on the suffragette question, and Aunt Maria was saying something about unladylike conduct when she broke off with a little scream and started to her feet. Uncle James had returned and was standing in the doorway.

But what a different Uncle James! There was no pomposity now, and the self-satisfied air had altogether vanished. His face was twitching nervously, and he kept on licking his lips as though he found it difficult to speak. At the sight of him Mrs. Clementina, whose back had been turned, gave a scream which cast Aunt Maria's insignificant squeak entirely into the shade and ran straight at him. She caught hold of the lapels of his coat convulsively.

"What's the matter?" she cried. "Something's happened; I know it has. Where's my little boy, where's my Thomas?"

"Calm yourself, Clementina," said Uncle James, but his voice was husky and unnaturally strained. "Calm yourself, I beg."

"I won't, I *won't!*" screamed Mrs. Clementina. "I won't be calm. Give me my little boy. Oh, what have you done to my little boy?" and she made a rush for the door.

Uncle James placed his back against it resolutely.

"No, Clementina, not now. Listen, pray listen," he said, and caught hold of her hands. For a moment they looked full into each other's eyes. Then Mrs. Clementina stepped backward a few paces and turned to Aunt Maria.

"Don't you know what's happened?" she said to her quite calmly. "Why, they have frightened him into an idiot," and she straightway went off into violent hysterics.

As for Tommy, he was at that moment lying in a dead faint in Mrs. Gollop's arms in the little blue room, having his collar loosed and brandy poured down his throat. And Benjamin in a taxi-cab was racing off to Bodney Street to call in Dr. Bellamy, Uncle James' medical adviser.

CHAPTER XXII

WILLIAM ACTS WITH GREAT PRUDENCE AND DISCRETION

WILLIAM went to bed that night without seeing Susannah, but as he had been told that the letter had been duly left at Pulteney Street, he concluded that all was well, and went to sleep with an easy mind. His astonishment was all the greater when, as it seemed, in the middle of the night he was awakened by some one shaking him. He sat up in bed sleepily rubbing his eyes, and there was his mother standing beside the bed with a candle telling him to get up.

“Don’t make a noise, and don’t ask any questions,” she said. “I’ll tell you all about it later.” William obediently got up and dressed, his mother sitting on a chair watching him. From the other side of the room came the sound of deep breathing, varied by occasional snores. Matthew evidently was not to be a party in the exploit, whatever it was, a reflection that gave William considerable satisfaction.

His first idea had been that this was a puni-

tive expedition, and that he was about to be dropped on with exceptional heaviness for some crime hereafter to be defined. Miss Comoran's cook seemed the most likely explanation, but he soon abandoned this theory, because his mother did not seem at all in a punitive mood. She helped him to fasten his necktie, and saw to the brushing of his hair herself.

He grew more and more mystified, and his astonishment reached its climax when, on following his mother downstairs, he found waiting in the dining-room no less a person than Father Genicot. At this sight he pinched himself cautiously to make sure it was not a dream.

"Hullo, Willy," said Father Genicot cheerfully, "you're a bit surprised to see me, aren't you?" and William admitted that he was. A glance at the clock showed him that it was nearly eleven.

"Well, I didn't expect to be here myself, as your mother will tell you," said Father Genicot, "but as a matter of fact we've got a rather important bit of business for you to do. Perhaps you'd better explain, Mrs. May."

"Come here, Willy," said Mrs. May, and William came. She put her arm round his shoulder and drew him close to her. "You've

been a bad boy the last few days, haven't you, Willy?" she said, but quite kindly.

"Yes, mother," said William in a very low voice, and blinking a little.

"Well, now you've got a chance of making up for it," she continued. "If you do what I want you to do to-night I shall forget all about the last few days, and I shall have something good to tell father when he comes home instead."

"Will I be let go down?" asked William eagerly.

"Yes, you will," said Mrs. May, "only mind you, it's a difficult thing you've got to do. You mustn't get frightened or lose your head or you'll spoil it all. Do you understand?"

"Yes, mother," said William, forgetting everything in his eagerness to know what was coming.

"It's about your friend, Tommy Browne," continued his mother. "He's very ill now and he wants you."

William's eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Tommy *ill*?" he said. "Why, I saw him this afternoon."

"Very likely," said Mrs. May. "He's got ill since. He's been locked up in the dark and

something's frightened him. He's got a very bad illness called brain fever."

William's jaw dropped with horror at these words. "Is he—is he going to die?" he gasped.

Mrs. May looked at Father Genicot, and Father Genicot nodded.

"He's so ill and it's such a dreadful illness that quite possibly he may die," said his mother. "Everything depends on whether they can get him quiet or not, and that's what you've got to try to do. He's been calling for you all the evening, and perhaps if you go and behave very sensibly and talk to him just as though nothing had happened it may do him good. Do you see, Willy? You'll try, now, won't you?"

William nodded. "I'll try," he said.

"Mind you, Willy, he won't be a bit like the Tommy you saw this afternoon," continued his mother. "He'll be in a room almost dark and shouting and talking nonsense. Very likely he won't know you. And you've just got to be quiet."

"All ri'," said William. He couldn't quite understand why they were making such a fuss about it. It seemed simple enough. But he was sorry about Tommy being ill.

"Well, go and put on your great coat, and

put these biscuits in the pocket to eat on the way," continued his mother. "Father Genicot will take you to where Tommy is, and I shall come to fetch you back in the morning."

William nodded again and went away to carry out these directions.

When the door had closed behind him Father Genicot glanced inquiringly at Mrs. May. "He seems to take it very quietly," he said. "Do you think he understands?"

"No," said Mrs. May. "He's only half awake at present. But he will when he gets there, and I can answer for it he won't do anything silly, and his father would say the same. When he makes up his mind to do a thing he generally carries it through."

"Hum," said Father Genicot. "Dr. Cameron, I believe, is against trying the experiment; it is Dr. Bellamy who wants it."

"Probably Dr. Bellamy has boys of his own," said Mrs. May, and at that moment William returned, duly enveloped in his great coat. The whole thing had been so strange that, as his mother suggested, he had not as yet quite shaken off the impression that it was somehow a waking-up dream.

Father Genicot rose when he appeared, and all three went out into the hall. At the door

Mrs. May stooped down and drew William to her again.

"I've told Father Genicot that father and I can trust you, Willy," she said, and William looked up gratefully. "All ri', mother," he answered, and kissed her and went away down the steps to where the cab was waiting. A moment later they were driving off through the almost deserted streets *en route* for the mansion of Uncle James.

Father Genicot did not talk much on the way, and William, thinking he was asleep, steadily munched biscuits and wondered why Tommy should be shouting for him, and whether it would mean that he could get off school to-morrow, and what Matt would think when he woke up in the morning and saw his empty bed. But just as they were turning the corner into Pulteney Street, the very corner where Mrs. Clementina had forgotten to stop the taxicab, Father Genicot suddenly broke the silence.

"Willy," he said, "did your father ever tell you what he does when he is in difficulties at sea?"

"Yes, Father," answered William; "he says the rosary."

"Well, I'd remember that to-night if I were

you," said Father Genicot. "If you're in difficulties think what your father would do."

Just as he said that the cab wheels suddenly left off making a noise, and William looked inquiringly out of the window.

"That's tan," said Father Genicot; "they've put it down in the road so as to stop the carts and things making a noise."

"'Cos of Tommy?" asked William incredulously. It seemed impossible that such colossal precautions should be taken for the sake of so ordinary and unimportant a person.

"Yes, because of Tommy," answered Father Genicot, and at that moment the cab drew up before the door of No. 56. For the first time William began to realize that something awful and unusual had happened. The sudden silencing of the wheels as the cab drove onto the tan made a deeper impression on him than anything his mother or Father Genicot had said. There was something frightening in it, something suggestive of unknown and terrible things. He entered the portals of No. 56 with forebodings almost as gloomy as those with which Tommy had passed its threshold earlier in the day.

The door was opened by Benjamin, and Father Genicot asked him if Dr. Bellamy was

downstairs. Benjamin thought he was, and Father Genicot said, "Tell him I've brought the boy."

Benjamin knocked at one of the doors and a moment later a stoutish gentleman dressed in a black frock coat came out.

"Ha! Father, I'm very glad to see you back," he said. "And this is Billy, I hope." He held out a large hand encouragingly, which William took and said, "How do you do, sir," wondering a little how he came to know his name.

"Yes, Dr. Bellamy," said Father Genicot. "This is Billy, and I think you will find him satisfactory. I must leave him with you and be getting home," he continued. "His mother will come for him in the morning. I suppose there's no chance of my being able to see the other to-night."

"Not the very smallest," said Dr. Bellamy. "The temperature has gone up a degree since you were here." All the time he was speaking he had his eyes fixed on William, who was listening eagerly, though not understanding it all by any means.

"You'll send for me at once if there's any change," said Father Genicot, and Dr. Bellamy promised to. "Nothing will happen to-

night," he said. "You can make your mind quite easy on that point."

"Good-by, Willy," said Father Genicot, turning to him. "You'll do just what Dr. Bellamy tells you, won't you?"

"Yes, Father," said William. He did not quite like the idea of being left alone in this strange house, but he naturally was not going to say so. He shook hands with Father Genicot and said "Good-night, Father," quite quietly. Dr. Bellamy was still watching him closely.

The interview had taken place in the hall, and when the front door closed behind Father Genicot the doctor beckoned to him and went back again into the room. "Come in here a minute, my boy," he said, and William followed. Dr. Bellamy seated himself in a large arm chair and made William sit in a chair just opposite. The room was brilliantly lighted with electric light.

For quite a long time the doctor sat silently gazing at him, the tips of his fingers joined together, and William began to feel uncomfortable, and to wonder whether he was doing anything wrong.

"How old are you, Billy?" asked Dr. Bellamy, at last breaking the silence.

"Twelve and a bit, sir," said William.

"And you know this poor lad very well, do you? You're a great chum of his, eh?" asked Dr. Bellamy. "Been in scrapes together?"

"Yes, sir," said William. "Lots of times." He began rather to like Dr. Bellamy.

"Well, then, you'll very probably be able to understand some of the things he says," continued the doctor. "You see he is delirious and doesn't know what he is talking about, and of course *we* can't tell. Now, if you do understand, I want you to say anything that comes into your head that you think will soothe him. Anything at all, it doesn't matter what. If he recognizes you, say you've come to stop. You won't mind that, will you? You'll do it for your friend?"

William nodded his head, horribly alarmed because he felt a sort of lump coming in his throat, and at that moment the door opened and another gentleman came in. This one was tall and had a thin face and gray hair and wore gold-rimmed glasses. He said something in a low voice to Dr. Bellamy and then turned and looked hard at William. Dr. Bellamy said something, and the other (it was Dr. Cameron, the well-known brain specialist) shrugged his shoulders and said, "Very well." But he did

not speak to William, and he did not look at him particularly pleasantly.

"Come along, Billy," said Dr. Bellamy in a cheerful sort of voice; "take off your coat and your boots and we'll go upstairs." William rose at once and got ready, and followed Dr. Bellamy out into the hall. His heart was beating rather fast, and following Father Genicot's advice, he began to say "Hail Marys" as hard as he could. Dr. Cameron followed close behind, and he mounted the stairs between them, feeling like a prisoner between two big policemen.

They went up two flights of stairs, and before they had quite got to the top of the second William heard a noise. It was an indistinct sort of noise, which made him for some reason think of his mother's big sewing machine when it was going full speed ahead. They went on down a passage until they came to a door, which Dr. Bellamy opened very cautiously, and then just as he opened it the noise stopped, and there came a scream such as William had never heard in his life before—it was the awful, inhuman scream of madness.

He started back involuntarily, and Dr. Bellamy closed the door again.

"I told you so," said Dr. Cameron. "You

can't expect it at his age," and he held the candle he was carrying close to William's face. With the best will in the world he could not help it being as white as a sheet. A great fear seized him that they weren't going to let him try, after all, and that he might lose the coveted reward of being let go down. "I'm not afraid, sir, really I'm not," he said eagerly.

"Quite sure?" said Dr. Bellamy, holding his arm.

"Not a bit, sir, honestly I'm not," said William, looking up entreatingly. "I—I rather like it, I do really," he added, and Dr. Bellamy nodded approvingly. Dr. Cameron sniffed. "Well, come in after me, then," said Dr. Bellamy; "walk on tip toe, and wait where I put you until he calls for you again. Then go straight up to the bed and speak to him as naturally as you can. William nodded, and Dr. Bellamy opened the door a second time. There was no blood-curdling scream, but from behind the big screen shutting off the door the sewing machine-like sound revealed itself as some one talking very fast, sometimes quite loud and sometimes almost in a whisper, but always at the same terrific speed.

William followed Dr. Bellamy in and stood, hardly daring to breathe, in the shadow of the

big screen. At first he thought the room was quite dark, but as he got used to it he saw that somewhere out of sight there must be a shaded light, because he was presently able to see the bed in the middle and a nurse sitting by the side, and something in the bed moving and tossing about. Dr. Bellamy stood by his side with one hand on his shoulder.

The gabbling noise went on without pausing even for a moment, and presently William began to be able to recognize what the thing (that was how he felt toward it; he did not feel a bit that it was Tommy) was saying. He distinctly heard a bit of the multiplication table, and the Latin prepositions that govern the ablative, and the definition of a logarithm, which Mr. Colquhoun had taken such trouble to impress upon his class. And then the voice sank down and became a mere mutter, and he saw the nurse turn away her head for a moment.

And then without any warning the thing sat straight up in bed, and William saw it and felt sick for a moment, because it seemed as though the head had grown twice its ordinary size, and it had a great white bandage round it. They thought they had prepared him carefully, but they had forgotten to tell him about

the ice bag. But he had scarcely time to think of this new horror before the voice began in quite a different tone, and now for the first time he felt that it was Tommy. *Oh, please, uncle, don't; I'll never do it again, really I won't,*" it was saying. *"Oh, you don't know what's inside. He's inside—he's blowing down my neck—oh, Atty, go to heaven—you might go to heaven."* And then came another of those awful screams, and Dr. Bellamy patted William gently on the back. But it was not needed. He knew now that it was Tommy, and all that was good and brave in William rose up in answer to that cry. He saw the nurse with her arm round Tommy trying to pull him back, and then the summons came.

"Billy, Billy, why don't you come?" he shrieked. *"Oh, Billy, I've always backed you up. Don't be a sneak like Aleck; you were in it same as me."* William didn't wait for any more. He walked boldly across the room and sat down on the chair beside the bed.

"It's all ri', Tommy," he said, *"I've come."*

Three people were listening breathlessly for the answer (Dr. Cameron was behind the screen). The gabbling stopped for a moment.

"Have you," said Tommy, *not quite so fast. "I thought you would, but the carpet's spoiled*

and she'll never forgive me; she said she wouldn't. He's coming again! He's coming again! and he blows down my neck. Oh! don't, Atty, don't!" and again came the blood-freezing scream. The nurse put her arm round Tommy and pulled him down into the bed again, and William's heart sunk. He had felt so sure that Tommy would recognize him, and that he would be able to make him quiet, and now he felt absolutely helpless. Nothing would ever stop that dreadful gabbling.

"I wish they wouldn't stare so," began the sick boy again. "It's beastly of them, beastly eyes, beastly eyes. Billy'll come, Billy's not a coward like Aleck. Oh, Billy, Billy, *why* don't you come?"

"I have come, Tommy, really I have," said William, and then with an inspiration, which may have come from his good little heart or may have been a present from somebody, he said in a loudish voice, "I was in it, same as Tommy."

At once the gabbling ceased, and William held his breath. There was no sound for a moment and then he saw in the dim light Tommy's hand come creeping out toward him. He remembered the playground at once and knew what *that* meant, and stretched his own

out to meet it. Tommy's fingers closed on it like a vice.

"Good old Billy," he murmured, almost quietly, "I *knew* you'd come." And again there was a pause.

"Don't they stare?" he began again; "they've been staring like that all day."

"Let 'em," said William; "who cares!" To his delight Tommy gave a little chuckle. "Stare away, you beasts," he said. "Billy and me don't care! Billy and me don't care! Billy and me don't care!"

"We'll go to sleep jus' to show them," said our wise William, with a memory of what his mother used to say when he was little. He was beginning to feel highly pleased with himself, and he gave a dramatic snore. Tommy made no response to this. The gabbling had stopped for quite a long time, but it began again now.

"He's coming again now, he always comes like that," he said; "first his hands, and then his face without any eyes, and he blows——"

"He *isn't*," said William stoutly, and to his relief it stopped, and the grip on his hand grew tighter. It was beginning to hurt a good deal, but he hardly noticed it in his excitement.

"Atty's dead! Atty's dead! Tommy killed

him! Tommy killed him!" he began in a sort of chant. William cut him short again.

"No, he isn't," he said; "Atty's all right. Didn't Susy tell you?"

"Susy, Susy, who's Susy? Atty's not Susy—Susy's not Atty," said the poor voice. But the ghost had been driven away.

"Susy told you that Atty was all right, don't you remember, Tommy?" said William tenderly. "My sister Susy."

"Susannah Mary May, Susannah Mary May," said Tommy, but much more quietly. "I'll pay it her back. Susannah Mary May. Such a nice name. If I had a sister, chocolate caramels cost sixpence an ounce. From a friend, she'll never know. My sister Susannah, I wonder what she'd like."

"She'd like you to go to sleep," said William with another inspiration. "She *said* so."

"My sister Susannah *wants* me to go to sleep," said Tommy. "She isn't really, you know, but I pretend she is. My sister Susannah, if he doesn't give it up I'll knock his ugly head off."

"She wants you to go to sleep," said William. "Don't you remember, Tommy?"

"My sister Susannah wants me to go to sleep," said Tommy again. "My sister Su-

sannah wants me to go to sleep. I like her awfully, and she called me Tommy."

The nurse on the other side of the bed looked across at William and nodded approvingly.

"She wants you to go to sleep," said William again. "To shut your eyes and go to sleep." He suited the action to the words, closed his own and gave another realistic snore.

To his joy it was answered by one from Tommy. The nurse put her fingers to her lips and glanced across again with a warning look.

For nearly five minutes there was no sound besides that of Tommy's rather irregular breathing. Then he suddenly opened his eyes wide again. "*Susy*," he said, "short for *Susannah*." His grip on William's hand slackened a little, his breathing became deeper. The blessed sleep, how blessed only those who have watched by such a bedside can fully know, had come at last and brought peace to the poor tortured little brain.

For the first few minutes William was so proud and elated at the thought of his success that he hardly noticed his own physical sufferings, and the nurse kept sending warning looks at him, and putting her finger to her lips. But after ten minutes of it his hand and arm began to ache dreadfully and the longing to move

became almost irresistible. Yet if he moved it was ten chances to one that Tommy would wake up and all be spoiled, for though his grip had relaxed a little, he still had tight hold of William's hand.

A terrible fear began to present itself, a fear that after all he might go and spoil everything, and be blamed instead of being rewarded and getting the coveted privilege. He glanced uneasily at Tommy, who muttered now and then in his sleep, and then across at the nurse, who every time she caught his eyes put her finger to her lips. He was just wondering how long he would be able to stand it when he found Dr. Bellamy at his side. He had come so noiselessly that not a sound had betrayed his approach, a wonderful feat considering he was a heavyish man.

"*Capital!*" he whispered into William's ear. "You couldn't have done better. Can you hold on for a bit longer?"

William nodded. He would, somehow he would, though the prospect of ten minutes more was pretty horrible.

Dr. Bellamy looked at him, then he bent over and looked at Tommy and at Tommy's hand. He paused a minute. "Billy, he whispered, "you mustn't move, however much it

hurts. Mind you, his life depends on it." Then he stole away as noiselessly as he had come.

This was a revelation to William, for though his mother had said that Tommy might die, he had seemed so very much alive that he had forgotten all about it. Now he understood what those shrieks and that horrid gabbling meant, and he kept on saying to himself, "If I move Tommy'll die. If I move Tommy'll die." For a time it seemed to make things easier and even to quiet the ache in his arm.

But it did not last. The pain came back again so bad that he had to grind his teeth together hard to prevent himself from crying out. He would have to give in, something inside told him he would have to, and Tommy would wake up and begin screaming again and die. "I won't! I won't!" he said to himself, but the tears came into his eyes, because of the fear that he might. He looked across to the nurse, but she only put her finger to her lips and shook her head. He hated her furiously.

Dr. Bellamy came back again, and it was in William's heart to ask him to stop, because it would be harder to give way if he were there to see. But he was too proud to do it when it came to the point and nodded his head when the doctor asked him if he could stand it. He

went away again, and William hated him, too.

It was so dark, so horribly dark, and he was getting cramp in one of his legs, and when he tried to move it the chair creaked and sent his heart into his mouth. Even at that tiny sound Tommy stirred, and William saw quite clearly that the slightest move of his hand would wake him up. The tears were trickling down his face and he dare not try to wipe them away. "Oh, God, don't let me move," he said, "'cos I know I'm going to."

Once again the form of Dr. Bellamy loomed beside him. "Just a little longer," he said. "Every minute's a gain." William nodded dolefully. It was all right for Dr. Bellamy to talk.

Once again he was alone in the darkness wrestling with the torturing desire to pull away his hand. He seemed to see a picture of his hand with all the fingers stretched out and waggling about, which was all heaven to him just then. Again he ground his teeth together, and again he said, "Oh, God, I must, but don't let me." And then all of a sudden came the memory of the afternoon and the crucifix and Father Genicot and what his father did in a fog. And here, if you please, we will pause

and not pull back any more curtains, because there are some places much too sacred for a mere story-teller to go prying into. There is a Holy of Holies in everybody's soul, which only the High Priest may lawfully enter. Next time Dr. Bellamy came he was surprised to see that William not only nodded, but grinned up at him courageously, a rather twisted but still unmistakable grin. And he continued this courageous demonstration at intervals of ten minutes for the next hour, though the grins grew steadily fainter, and were at last hardly recognizable as such. At the end of that time both doctors came in together and looked at Tommy and consulted together in whispers, and Dr. Cameron bent down and very, very gently unlocked his hand. And Tommy was by that time far away in the blessed land of sleep and did not notice.

So William's ordeal ended, and they helped him out together, and when he got outside the reaction came and he broke down altogether. Dr. Cameron picked him up and carried him downstairs, and they put him on a sofa and massaged his arm and put some ointment on his hand where the finger nails had run into the flesh. And William all the time was crying like a baby and saying he wanted his mother.

And if you think meanly of him for that I make bold to say, dear sir or madam, that you are no better than a fool.

They got him quiet at last and gave him something to drink, and he dried his eyes, or tried to. "I know it's k-kiddish, but I c-can't help it," he said apologetically. Dr. Cameron was sitting on a chair beside him, and he shook his head at that. "No, no," he said. "We're much pleased with you; you've done just what we wanted. You've acted with great prudence and discretion."

"I know what I shall tell your mother when I see her to-morrow," said Dr. Bellamy, who was standing up. "I shall tell her she ought to be proud of having such a plucky boy for her son."

William looked up gratefully and then yawned an enormous yawn. But that was because the stuff they had given him to drink was a sleeping draught.

CHAPTER XXIII

SHORT BUT GLORIOUS

THE first thing William saw when he woke up next morning was Dr. Bellamy and his mother standing beside the sofa on which he was lying, and talking to each other. It took him a minute or two to remember where he was, and he sat up and stared about in rather a dazed sort of fashion.

"Hullo!" said Dr. Bellamy; "had a good sleep?" William smiled rather faintly, but made no direct answer. His mother bent down and kissed him.

"Well done, Willy," she said. "I knew we could trust you."

"Yes, indeed," said Dr. Bellamy heartily. "I think you must make him a doctor, Mrs. May. He certainly has a natural turn for it."

"I'm going to be a sailor," said William stoutly.

"Ah!" said Dr. Bellamy. "Then if ever I go for a voyage I shall ask you to take me in your ship." He meant to be agreeable and complimentary, but William thought it rather a silly

remark, because the doctor seemed to think that ships went anywhere at haphazard, and that there were no such things as lines of steamers, so he made no answer.

"Well, you'd better get up now, Willy," said Mrs. May; "you won't be wanted any more, but Mrs. Browne has some breakfast ready for you, and Dr. Bellamy says you must have a holiday to-day, so I shall leave you here. Don't get into mischief and be home in time for dinner."

"Yes, mother," said William, not unnaturally elated at the news that he was free for the day, and his own master till one o'clock. He got up from the sofa and his mother prepared to depart.

"You must allow me to thank you, Mrs. May," said Dr. Bellamy, as he opened the door, "on behalf of Dr. Cameron and myself, for letting us have Willy's help so promptly last night. As I told you, his courage and good sense have probably saved our little patient's reason, and perhaps his life. I think you ought to be very proud of having such a plucky boy for your son."

Mrs. May turned and looked at William in a peculiar way.

"Well, perhaps I am a little bit, doctor," she

said. "Who knows, eh, Willy? And perhaps some one else will be a little proud, too, when he comes home." Then she went away, leaving William the happiest boy, I verily believe, in all that big city whose name we always so carefully leave unrecorded.

The rest of that day was all glory for William. He had a bath in Uncle James' sumptuous bathroom, where the supply of hot water was unlimited, and you had not to bother about the one who came next complaining you had used too much. He had a truly regal breakfast in an enormous dining-room, which might have been awe-inspiring rather than agreeable had not Mrs. Gollop appeared on the scene and driven Benjamin away and made him feel at home. It was from Mrs. Gollop that he heard of Susannah's exploit of the day before, and she declared that it was her firm belief that but for Susannah the poor lamb (meaning Tommy) would have been dead before they found him. She was enthusiastic in praise of Susannah's pluck and intelligence. "Went off like a little soldier, so she did," said Mrs. Gollop, and for the tiny fraction of a second (to tell the plain truth, as I always do) William felt the least little bit in the world jealous at the thought of having to share with another the

glory of having rescued Tommy. But he got over that and resolved to let his mother and the whole family know what Mrs. Gollop said. He thought it highly probable that Susannah's lot that morning was likely to be cast in less pleasant paths than his own, as indeed it was, for she was kept in at school and got a bad mark for not knowing her lessons, not being able to explain her failure even to her beloved Sister Elizabeth. And though William kept his resolution, and Susannah was pardoned, she was not praised (I suppose rightly), and in fact got very little credit out of the affair. And yet I cannot help thinking that she showed, all things considered, almost as much pluck as William, and it is further my private opinion that Susannah's prayers were at the bottom of a good deal of William's success. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the flags and trumpets went all to William, who was certainly worthy of them, though Susannah was not without a reward of a less public sort.

After breakfast William had an interview with Uncle James in the library, an interview which neither enjoyed very much, but which Uncle James' high sense of duty obliged him to undergo. He was exceedingly nervous and consequently so pompous and grandiloquent

that for a long time William thought he was being scolded and looked sulky and defiant, having naturally a prejudice against Uncle James as the author of Tommy's misfortunes. However, when presently his host, with what was intended to be a jocular remark, tried to slip a sovereign into his hand, he understood that he was being praised and rewarded. He refused the sovereign on the ground that his mother did not like him to take money from strangers, but also because he himself did not like the idea of being paid for helping Tommy. The sacrifice to principle and duty was not really a severe one, because so large a sum as a sovereign would certainly have been appropriated by his mother and added to his account in the savings bank. And what is the good of an account in the savings bank if your mother keeps your bank book, and wants to know why when you ask for it?

Uncle James did not seem at all offended at his refusal, and put the sovereign back into his waistcoat pocket without a murmur. "Well, my boy, you've done me a great service," he said, "a very great service indeed, and I shan't forget it." He held out his hand and gave William a squeeze which painfully recalled his sufferings of the night before. The interview

then terminated, to the relief, I fancy, of both parties.

At Mrs. Gollop's invitation William waited to hear the report of the doctors after their morning visit. It was highly satisfactory; Tommy's temperature was going down steadily and he was asleep again. His memory, as always in such cases, had entirely gone, and it would be a long time before he would be able to see visitors, because he was very weak. "But when he does," said Dr. Bellamy, "you shall be one of the first." He said that Tommy's mother had asked him to express her thanks to William, being too upset at present to see any one. This was a distinct relief, as William's interview with Uncle James had taught him that this form of glory is apt to be embarrassing.

He had just said good-by to Mrs. Gollop at the front door, and was standing admiring the Doctor's splendid motor car waiting outside, when its owner came up behind him and asked him if he would like a ride. The next few hours he spent whisking from one end of the town to the other by the side of Dr. Bellamy's chauffeur, a most agreeable young man, who let him blow the horn all the time, and instructed him in the mysteries of driving during the rather

long intervals of waiting while the Doctor was paying his visits. Finally, when the Doctor's rounds were over, and he had said good-by to William very kindly indeed, he told the chauffeur to drive him home. His last remark was, "Don't forget you've got to take me in your ship some day," and William was so pleased with Dr. Bellamy by that time that he took the trouble to explain the difficulty, and gave him the names of the lines which would most probably secure his services and the ports to which its steamers went. Dr. Bellamy promised to bear that in mind.

The car dashed up Roscommon Street in fine style, and you may be sure there was plenty of tooting on the horn as they drew near No. 5. The windows were full of Mays of different ages and sexes watching him as he waved good-by to the chauffeur and ready to welcome him in the hall. Thus gloriously did William return to the paternal roof, who but two days before had crept, a terror-stricken and dishevelled fugitive, up those very steps to meet inside a retribution not less painful and humiliating because well merited.

In the afternoon, after watching with infinite satisfaction the rest of the family, and especially Matthew, depart to school, he went

down by special permission to see Mr. Potts the Pilot, and Mr. Potts was able to take him for a little cruise down the river on his celebrated launch, the *Pandora*, and to get back in time for tea with Mrs. Potts, whose teas were famous. At night, after retiring, he had to recount the whole story of his adventures for Matthew's benefit, which he did with modesty and no small satisfaction. Matthew was pleased to say that on the whole he had behaved with as much enlightenment as could be expected from a kid. So the most memorable day in William's life ended, and he went to sleep and dreamt of motor cars and chauffeurs and other such interesting subjects.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BROTHERHOOD REUNITED

WE MUST now return to Tommy, who for many days after that eventful night was so weak and ill that he was not allowed to talk at all, and the room in which he lay was kept dark. Little by little his memory came back, and with it the burden of his troubles. Mrs. Clementina hardly ever left him, so as to be able to dissipate these vain fears as they arose. The thing that weighed upon him most was the carpet, and she was able to set his mind at ease on that point by telling him that Uncle James had promised to present a new one. During these long, long days, when Tommy scarcely ever woke from the sleeps which were slowly bringing him back to health without seeing Mrs. Clementina sitting by the side of his bed, they came to understand each other better than they had ever done before, for Tommy told his mother things he would never have told her while he was well, and in Mrs. Clementina's mind the awful phantom of the youthful hooligan with the instincts of a savage and a naturally headstrong and obstinate disposition,

which Uncle James in his ignorance had conjured up, vanished away for ever, and she knew that her Thomas was what she had always thought him, just an honest little boy who, like the rest of us, did silly things and was sorry for them, but whose heart was sound and principally occupied by his mother. There were white lines in Mrs. Clementina's hair when at last the two returned to Laburnam Villa, but I doubt if she did not think her new-found knowledge bought cheaply at the price.

For a long time the events which caused his illness remained as a sort of black cloud at the back of Tommy's mind, but little by little even that cleared up, and he was allowed to talk about it and to ask questions. Attwood had been back at school some time when that stage was reached, and it seemed strange to Tommy that the parts should have been so entirely reversed. He was not allowed to see visitors even then, or he would have asked to have Attwood sent for.

And indeed his first visitor, when at last Dr. Bellamy gave the necessary permission, was not Attwood, nor yet William, who it might be thought had the first claim, and indeed had been actually promised the privilege. His first visitor was no other than Susannah. Tommy

heard of Susannah's part in the proceedings, not from his mother but from Mrs. Gollop, who had taken charge of him one evening so that his mother might go out and get a little air.

As we know, Mrs. Gollop was a warm admirer of Susannah and she painted her exploit in glowing colors. Tommy listened attentively throughout, but failed to respond to Mrs. Gollop's enthusiasm. "Was I makin' much noise then?" he asked anxiously, and Mrs. Gollop said of course he was, but that any one would have done the same,—she was sure *she* would have and more,—and that it was the most natural thing in the world. To all of which comforting assurances Tommy listened without answering, and when his mother returned he said he wanted something as a special favor.

"What is it, my precious blessing?" said Mrs. Clementina tenderly.

"Please, mummy dear, I want to see Susannah," he said eagerly. Mrs. Clementina was silent for a moment. I fear she was not quite as grateful to Susannah as she ought to have been, a state of mind not unusual with regard to people who happen to have been in the right when we were wrong. But in the end of course

she promised to speak to Dr. Bellamy about it, and Dr. Bellamy, to every one's surprise, for Tommy's progress had not lately been quite satisfactory, gave his consent. A note was accordingly dispatched inviting Susannah to tea on the following day, a note which caused no little commotion in the May household when it arrived. William, in particular, was very hurt and upset, and this time more than a little jealous at finding another, and that other a girl, preferred to himself. However, there was no avoiding facts, and the next day Matthew (for William, I regret to say, was sulking) escorted Susannah to number 56, where she was effusively greeted by Mrs. Gollop and presented in the first place to Aunt Maria. Mrs. Clementina was out that afternoon.

And after a little conversation with Aunt Maria, conducted on Susannah's part in accordance with the best models, and such as even the author of "Politeness Costs Nothing" (Madame Eugenie Delaport-Hutchinson) would have approved, she was conducted upstairs by Mrs. Gollop. Tommy was sitting up in bed, propped by pillows and looking so thin and weak and ill that Susannah was quite upset. "Oh, Tommy, I *am* so sorry," she said, and Tommy said he was much better and going

to get up next week, and had grown a lot and would probably grow some more and she might tell William. He asked her to take a seat, which she did, and then they both suddenly felt shy, and regretted that Mrs. Gollop had withdrawn. There was a long pause.

"I hope you'll soon be better," said Susannah at length, and Tommy thanked her and said he thought he would. Then there was another pause which stretched out to a quite appalling length.

"I say, you know," said Tommy, breaking it at last, "you won't mind if I ask you something, will you?" He spoke rather nervously, and without looking at his visitor, and did not wait for an answer. "That night you know, you heard, didn't you? Me in the cellar, you know. You *did* hear, didn't you?"

Susannah nodded.

"I know I was makin' a horrid row," he continued hurriedly, "but I thought Atty was dead, and I thought he was down there, too. I know it was kiddish, but I couldn't help it, really I couldn't. I believe even Billy would have."

"I didn't think it was that a *bit*, I didn't *really*," said Susannah honestly, and I *knew* you couldn't help it, and I knew you were

awfully brave 'cos of my money box," she drew her chair a little nearer to Tommy, not knowing in the least the flood of consolation her words had poured upon his soul.

Tommy looked at her gratefully. "I'd do it again any time," he said, "I'll make him say he's sorry if you like."

"We've made friends now, at least Willie has," said Susannah, "and he's had a good thrashing for not owning up like Willie, and it's done him a lot of good, Willie says."

"Has he?" said Tommy with interest. "I suppose Willie knows?"

"Knows what?" asked Susannah.

"About me shoutin'," said Tommy rather shamefully.

Susannah shook her head. "I didn't tell him," she said. "I didn't tell anybody 'cept your mother 'cos I thought they wouldn't understand."

"Oh, Susy," said Tommy, venturing for the first time upon that familiarity. "You *are* a decent sort," and then he suddenly turned over and disappeared under the bedclothes.

"What's the matter?" asked Susannah somewhat alarmed.

"It's all ri'," came in muffled tones. "I have to do this 'cause I'm ill." He reappeared almost

immediately with certain tell-tale marks on his face which Susannah was much too kind and tactful to notice. A tremendous weight had been lifted from Tommy's mind, a weight which Mrs. Clementina and all the other grown-ups concerned would have been powerless to remove. The thought of what the boys would say if this detail was revealed had perhaps been responsible for the slowness of his recovery. He was so grateful to Susannah that he could find no words to express it and lay looking at her and blinking now and then and smiling. And Susannah, her shyness quite gone, as if by magic, felt exceedingly happy and smiled back at him and patted his hand and pulled his pillows straight, bustling about like a little mother. Things had come to this happy pass when Mrs. Gollop entered with the tea.

Her first impulse when she saw the state Tommy was in was to bundle his visitor out straight away. However, at the first suggestion of such a proceeding the invalid caught hold of Susannah's hand and showed so much eagerness in detaining her that Mrs. Gollop gave way, and they had a very comfortable tea together, Susannah pouring out and Mrs. Gollop hovering about and helping to keep the

conversation going. It was a good thing, I fancy, that Mrs. Gollop stayed, for Tommy had conceived the romantic project of kissing Susannah's hand (Sir Vere Vereker performs the operation several times on Lady Ermintrude's slender taper fingers in the "Bloodstain on the Boulder"), and being a very shy boy it would certainly have excited him a good deal, while I fancy Susannah would have been inclined to laugh, if not too astonished to do anything. Mrs. Gollop's prosaic presence obliged him to give up the idea, and she organized on her own account a demonstration which was much more effective and equally consoling. For when at last Susannah rose to go and Tommy held out his hand to say good-by, she suggested an amendment. "Give him a kiss, Missie," she said; "poor lad, he's been through a lot," and Susannah did without making any fuss about it, a good honest, rather unromantic smack, for which Tommy was immensely grateful. So ended the interview in which Susannah got her reward, a small one you may think, but very lasting, for Tommy never forgot.

After that he began to get better very rapidly, and within a week William was admitted. We need not go into all the details with regard to that visit, which was at first not

at all a success, for Tommy, though very grateful and anxious to express his gratitude, was terribly afraid of doing something to compromise himself, being still very weak, and the unusual circumstances of their meeting made William shy and uncomfortable.

Things improved a good deal, however, when they got on the subject of Alexander, a subject on which William had much interesting information to furnish. Mainly through the energy and acuteness of Mr. Colquhoun, Alexander's guilt as regards the blackboard and his complicity in the Attwood affair had been brought home to him, and he had been visited with the extreme penalty of the law. He blubbed like a kid all afternoon school," said William, "and nobody'd speak to him, and Potter caught him next day and spanked him, too, so he caught it a bit all round."

"Poor old Aleck," said Tommy, "I never thought he'd let Potter catch him."

"Bein' licked seemed to knock all the go out of him," said William. "He'd blub almost if you only looked at him, and you'd think he couldn't swagger if he tried. It's done him a lot of good *I* think."

"Have you made friends with him now?" asked Tommy.

William nodded. "His sister asked my sister to ask me to," he answered; "she said he was most awful miserable 'cos nobody'd speak to him and they thought he was getting ill. So I did, and he was most tremenjously grateful. He wants to be a Black Brother again, and he says he was a cad for not backin' us up. He's not a bit like what he used to be."

"Did you say we would?" asked Tommy.

"Yes," said William, "I thought you wouldn't mind, and he was more tremenjously grateful than ever. He said he was so miserable the Saturday before that he meant to run away, only his sister was sewing a button on his Sunday trousers, and he couldn't run away in shorts. You can see from that the sort of state of mind he was in."

Tommy nodded. "I'm glad he's come back," he said, "I always liked old Aleck."

"So did I, in a way," said William. "Lots of the chaps won't speak to him still, and Potter kicks him a bit now and then, but he doesn't mind now that I'm backing him up. He'll be awfully glad to hear you are too."

"You might ask him to come and see me," said Tommy. "Ask him to come to-morrow."

"All ri'," said William a little doubtfully, "but don't say anything to make him ruffed up again." At that juncture Mrs. Clementina

arrived on the scene, and was introduced to William, who shortly afterwards took his departure. The accounts of Tommy's mother given by Susannah had not impressed him favorably.

The next day Alexander duly presented himself and was admitted. He came in looking extremely solemn, and sat nervously on the edge of his chair, and made the usual polite inquiries about Tommy's health. He, like William, found the unusual circumstances of the meeting somewhat embarrassing, and he had further a confession to make, which added to the difficulties of the situation.

"It's all ri', Aleck," said Tommy, guessing more or less what was the matter. "Billy's told me, and I'm jolly glad you've come back."

"Did Billy tell you about me being licked?" said Aleck, and Tommy nodded assent.

"I dessay he said I blubbed," said Aleck, "but it wasn't because of being licked, but because of what Daddy Jim said. Billy needn't talk, he'd 've blubbed too." Tommy nodded sympathetically.

"Did he tell you about Potter catchin' me?" asked Aleck, and Tommy again assented. "I never thought you'd let him," he said.

"I let him on purpose," said Aleck, turning rather pink.

Tommy's eyes opened wide. "Why ever?" he asked with astonishment.

"I wanted to make up," said Aleck, turning still pinker and looking at him rather wistfully, "'cos I was beastly sorry for not backing you and Billy up, really I was, Tommy. Only don't tell Billy, 'cos he'd think it soft."

Tommy was immensely touched and impressed at this striking proof of repentance, and remained intent for a moment.

"And I told Aggie about me being in it, same as you and Billy; she cried like anything, but I told her," continued Aleck. "And I've been to my jooties and I'll always back you up another time, really I will, Tommy." The eyes of the usually self-possessed Alexander were brimming with tears, and Tommy was still more deeply impressed. "It's all ri', Aleck," he murmured, and held out his hand, which Alexander grasped gratefully.

"I really always will," he said, and in this way the Black Brotherhood once more came into being. Only now there was rather more of the brotherhood about it, and perhaps a little less of the blackness.

It was Mrs. Clementina again who interrupted the conversation, and she insisted on making a sketch of Alexander, who, as I have hinted, was by no means devoid of personal at-

tractions. Before the interruption Tommy had with some difficulty obtained permission to tell William of the real meaning of the Potter episode, and before Alexander left a meeting had been arranged at which all three should be present and solemnly ratify their reunion. It took place a day or two later, and there I should be content to leave the Black Brothers but for the fact that I have one or two more notable events to chronicle.

The first of these is the surprising generosity of Uncle James. Uncle James, as may be supposed, had had a terrible fright, and in the first flush of gratitude at the happy termination of the adventure, he asked to be allowed to pay for all the rest of Tommy's education, and to send him to the University. Nay more, he insisted on Mrs. Clementina's taking Tommy for the Christmas vacation to Cannes, which is, I understand, an attractive town on the Mediterranean Sea, to complete his recovery. And in case Tommy might feel the want of male society, William was invited to accompany him. Thus did Uncle James keep his promise of not forgetting.

Yet even this was not the crown of William's glory, for a full account of his exploit had reached Captain May on his way home, and when William and Matthew went down

to the bar with Mr. Potts in the *Pandora* to meet the *Bulurwayo*, Jack, who met them as they stepped on board (he was, you may remember, an officer on that famous vessel), informed them that William was to go to the Captain at once on the bridge. This was an honor which had never befallen any of the family before, and William was almost overcome as he followed his brother up the steps, thinking how smart he looked in his uniform. At the top of the steps the Captain met them. "Well done, old man," he said, patting him on the back. "Come up here and help Mr. Potts navigate the ship."

So William, in the face of all the world and especially of the passengers who were fluttering about on the deck below, sailed magnificently up the river by the side of his illustrious father, and burst upon the family group on the dock wall in that position. And he helped the man who was working the machine which conveys the captain's orders to the engine room, turning it from full speed ahead to half speed, from half speed to slow, and from slow to stop dead. And this last signal is obviously a hint that it is time to bring this long and complicated narrative of adventures to a close.

EPILOGUE

SOME people like to know how everything ends in a story, and as the modern craze for realism prevents me saying "they lived happily ever afterwards," something has to be provided by way of a winding up. So, with a view to satisfying this demand I offer a few notes as to the subsequent careers of the various persons whose fortunes we have for so long been following.

To begin with the most dignified and exalted, the Reverend Doctor Whales. Dr. Whales, very shortly after the events here dealt with, abandoned the scholastic profession and went out as a missionary to South Africa. Many people thought it odd, but they were not, for the most part, people who knew Dr. Whales. After many years of missionary labor he became Mgr. Whales, and is now Vicar-Apostolic of the M'Gombo district and titular bishop of Hippopotopolis. He is said to be in high favor in Rome, a prominent member of the Curia having been heard to remark (after a prolonged interview with his lordship) that the Bishop of Hippopotopolis was a very remarkable prelate.

Father Genicot, I regret to say, is dead. He died of an attack of confluent pneumonia, caught while presiding at a penance drill. He died just as the boys were going out for morning recess, and the noise of their voices was the last sound he heard on this planet. His death was very quiet and very businesslike. "My boys will get me out of purgatory," he gasped just before the end, and I should not be surprised if he was right. Some of them, I know, did their best.

Mr. Colquhoun, to descend a step in the hierarchy, is now headmaster of the Grimborough Institute, where he does very little teaching, but corrects, as beautifully and remorselessly as ever, a very large number of examination papers. Mr. Tanqueray still teaches in the college, and is, if possible, slightly less amiable and more unobservant.

To come now to the lower orders. Tommy, whom we will deal with first, is, from a worldly point of view, the most prosperous, being a junior partner in the firm of Browne, Patterson and Appolonaris (Uncle James' firm). His illness had one rather peculiar effect upon Tommy, for whereas before it he had shown no marked aptitude for mathematics, after he had recovered he became quite a proficient in

the subject, and by the time he reached the sixth was a good second to Attwood, and running him hard. Possibly the mathematical lobe of his brain had been in some way stimulated by his adventure in the cellar, and some day perhaps, when educational methods are more scientifically developed, boys and girls who are slow in this all-important subject will be treated in a similar way. There are certainly cases to be met with which seem to call for some sort of surgical treatment.

Tommy won a scholarship at the University, where he did brilliantly. A paper he read before the Ricardo Society on Bi-metallism was afterwards published as a pamphlet, and may be obtained for the small sum of one penny from the publishers, Messrs. Burst and Stuckett. There will be no difficulty in obtaining a copy, for the sale was not large (although the "Economist" praised it as a promising effort, and the "Statistical Review" said it should look with interest for Mr. Browne's next work), being principally limited to copies purchased by Uncle James for presentation purposes. Indeed, the venture had been throughout financed and supported by the same gentleman, whose relations with Tommy quite changed after the accident. It seemed to give him a new interest

in his nephew; he watched his career with growing pride, and at the close of his university course offered him a very good position in his office, an offer which Tommy accepted. Here he developed businesslike qualities of a high order, and on the occasion of his marriage was made a junior partner. He will some day be a rich man, for Uncle James makes no secret of the fact that Tommy is to be his heir, and he will, on Uncle James' retirement, become head of the business.

He married a lady with whom the reader is already acquainted—Miss Susannah Mary May, daughter of Commander May, R.N.R., and the wedding, which took place at St. Stephen's Church, was a very magnificent one, the entire ship's company of the *Buluwayo* (Captain John May) and of the *Manichee* filling a large portion of the body of the church. The *Manichee* at the time numbered two of the bride's brothers among her crew, her first officer being no other than our old friend William, and one of the apprentices, Mr. James Arthur May. The bride was given away by her father, who was in full uniform and looked very magnificent. The bride's party on the whole was the more imposing company, numbering among it so many gentlemen in uni-

form, yet no single figure in it could bear comparison with that of the bridegroom's mother. In the account of the wedding in the local papers two whole lines were devoted to Mrs. Clementina's costume, and her head-dress was of oxidized passementerie (if you know what that is), with ostrich brush and lace insertions. But apart from Mrs. Clementina, there was only Uncle James, whom the unwonted atmosphere of a Catholic Church made nervous, and Aunt Maria, who failed to live up to her expensive dress, and Mrs. Golightly, who sat at the back and wept during the whole ceremony, to the annoyance of Mrs. Gollop, her neighbor, who was out to enjoy herself, and had on her lap two pounds of rice and an old shoe wrapped up in a brown paper parcel. She had traveled a considerable distance in order to be present at the wedding, having some years before quitted Uncle James' service and gone to keep house for her son, the station master at Rhualt Machdywddy, an important junction in Wales. He had been left a widower, and Mrs. Gollop looks after his seven children.

Among the guests who assembled at No. 5 Roscommon Street for the wedding breakfast were Professor Attwood (whose treatises on "Homogeneous Strains" and "Some Two Di-

mensional Problems in Electrostatics" have lately attracted considerable attention) and Mr. Alexander Comoran. Mr. Comoran's present to the bride and bridegroom (for he was invited as the friend of both parties) took the form of cutlery, Alexander being traveler for the eminent Sheffield firm of Jevons, Blake and Golly, and considered, too, one of the smartest of their men on the road. His hair is still curly and yellowish, and time has added a very elegant mustache of the same hue and texture. At school his later career was not brilliant, and he disappointed the hopes of his aunt and sister by failing to get a scholarship, or indeed to get anything at all, except a good deal of well-merited abuse for unmitigated and hopeless laziness. He left somewhat under a cloud a year after William entered on his first year's apprenticeship, but Father Genicot was reported to have said that he would fall on his feet, and he did. Though without Tommy's interest to push him, his rise in the commercial world was almost as rapid, and at the date of the wedding he was already prosperous, as the handsomeness of his present and the smartness of his gray frock suit, and his orchid, and his gold sleeve links, and his beautiful boots clearly revealed to the discerning eye. His aunt and

Miss Aggie (headmistress now of the Herman Stophkinder Institute), who were likewise at the wedding, thought him the handsomest man present, and perhaps he was.

All wedding breakfasts are much the same, so I do not propose to describe this one in detail. There were a good many speeches, Uncle James in particular distinguishing himself, and Alexander brought down the house by a spirited description of the money-box incident in the days of long ago. Every one agreed that it was most touching and romantic, and every one was pleased with Alexander's modesty in describing himself as the villain of the piece. The wedding presents, which were laid out in a room upstairs (the very nursery in which James Arthur and the bride had had their nocturnal interview), were duly admired, Mrs. Clementina's portrait of Susannah and Uncle James' offering of jewelry coming in for especial praise. And then the carriage and pair arrived, and there were pathetic scenes in the hall, and the happy pair disappeared into the carriage, the door being closed by the first officer of the *Manichee*, who had a last hug from the bride very like the hugs of the old Susannah, and a grip from the bridegroom which recalled his sufferings on a certain event-

ful night in the long ago. And when at last the carriage drove off, the first officer did not re-enter the house, but strode off to the docks and spent the remainder of the day and all that night in the seclusion of his cabin on the *Manichee*, smoking a good many more cigars than were good for him. For though he was very glad indeed, you understand, he did not want to see anybody just then, for it seemed as though he had lost at one blow his best friend and his faithful little sister. For similar reasons Mrs. Clementina drove home alone, and remained locked up in her bedroom all the rest of the day, refusing even Mrs. Golightly's suggestion of cocoa. Alexander spent the evening quietly at his hotel, and thought a good deal of Miss Jane O'Docherty. And I hope he will think about her a good deal more, for she is a very sensible young lady, and will keep Alexander in order and make him (I trust) smoke an honest pipe, instead of the abominable and expensive cigarettes, of which at present he consumes a prodigious number.

Tommy and Susannah settled down at Tandem Villa, but moved a few years afterward to Beacon House, which is well outside the city and stands in its own grounds, from certain points of which there is a most charming view

of the distant river and its shipping. In this garden many reunions of the Black Brotherhood have been held, and doubtless will be held, and in this eligible mansion Tommy and Susannah are as happy as people can be in an imperfect world with a variable climate, and have quite a number of second-edition Tommys and Susannahs to keep them from getting dull. And if I follow their fortunes any further I shall find myself involved in the adventures of Thomas Clement, who is already a preparatory, and so shall be forced to begin a new book. Which would be a misfortune from every point of view.

Whether Dr. Bellamy ever redeemed his promise of going for a voyage on William's ship I do not know, but I had myself that privilege, and a proud man I was, strolling at will in and out of the captain's cabin (he is Captain William now), and the chart room, and other sacred places, and smoking the captain's cigars in a luxurious deck chair (with arms) especially provided for my comfort. We had some rather dirty weather during the trip, and I could swear I heard the captain shout on one occasion, "Port your helm, you silly idjut!" though he tells me it must have been imagination, and that memory played me false. A

fellow-passenger remarked to me on that occasion that our captain seemed a very smart and reliable officer, to which I gave a ready assent, adding with a burst of, I trust, pardonable pride, that he was an old pupil of mine (the secret is out at last).

“Really!” said my fellow-passenger. “It must be a very interesting thing to be a school-master.”

“Yes,” I said, “I think it is. Do you know, I really think it is.”

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